

*The Epic Hero and the Decline
of Heroic Poetry*

A STUDY OF THE NEOCLASSICAL
ENGLISH EPIC WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO
MILTON'S 'PARADISE LOST'

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*The Problem of the Decline of Epic Poetry between Milton's
'Paradise Lost' and the Romantic Verse Narrative*

This thesis proposes to discuss the decline and disintegration of epic poetry from Milton's *Paradise Lost* up to the early nineteenth century, when Crabbe, Southey, Byron and Scott set out to revive the epic verse narrative in a new and different spirit.

It is the period in English literature, at the beginning of which the traditional epic hero—a man of deeds, usually a great warrior fighting in the quest of honour and glory—seemed suddenly to lose his hitherto unchallenged position as an accepted representative or at least symbol of the human and cultural peculiarities of the age by which he was sung; the period during which 'epic' rapidly ceased to be the equivalent of 'heroic poetry' because the man of deeds had to give way to a type of man who had little in common with the incontestable, superhuman or even sublime qualities with which the hero—particularly in the martial sense of the word—had by necessity been endowed since time immemorial.

Our central theme, therefore, will be the history of the epic hero. His omnipresence in all questions concerning the development of epic poetry justifies the assumption that by mainly focusing our attention on him we can abstain from discussing every detailed aspect of the vast subject-matter in hand without impairing the main motive for the striking changes of the epic muse within the period of time indicated. The epic hero is in fact the one aspect in which all the others are centered and to which they are all subsequent, and he may be said to dominate and influence the literary development of this genre with very much the same uncompromising force as he did his armies in his poem.

We are not proposing to give a renewed documentation of the fact that the decline of heroic poetry did take place, or to write another history of 'the death of the hero', but rather to discuss the struggle for survival of the 'man of deeds', an aspect of epic literature which has never been seriously dealt with, yet which is far more interesting and important in its consequences for literary appreciation than the negative way of approach. The mere factual acknowledgement of the death of the old hero is identical with a peremptory dismissal of the genre as something which has long ceased to affect the nature of more modern thinking.

And this is, in fact, the prevailing attitude today. No standard work of literary history mentions any epic of value in the considerable space of time

that lies between Milton and the Romantics, and gives little account of any important theory of the epic which should have exercised any decisive influence on the poetic consciousness of that age. The opinion of our time concerning the fate of the epic after Milton is summed up in a statement such as Clark's: "it may be said that the age of epic poets is past¹".

What, then, happened to a species of literature which seemed to have disappeared at the very moment when by common consent of poets and critics it was praised as the highest and greatest of all and which, even in the opinion of our time, is to sing "of man, and man's purpose in the world"²? Why such a tremendous gap in the long line of verse narrative, and why, at the end of it, a seemingly new development which, at first sight, shows so little interdependence with the older formal tradition?

We do not believe that the decline of the formal epic can be explained merely as a temporary estrangement from the heroic medium. Explanations of modern criticism like that of Clark, according to which "the epopee is not a genre that necessarily appears in every age"³, do not penetrate to the heart of the matter. Nor does Abercrombie's theory of the epic series, which holds that there had been a first golden age of epic poetry from Homer to Virgil, another one from Beowulf to Milton, and that a third one might conceivably occur after the present period of depression, a theory whose justification rests on the presupposition of a return to social conditions similar to those of the first two periods, a return, however, which could only be effected in a violent reduction to a primitive society which would simply reiterate the process of epic development.

Conjectures of this kind merely state apparent facts. They spring from a formalist point of view; they therefore ignore organic development and, consequently, do not account for just this, unique, epic depression. Indeed, there have been several slack periods throughout the ages, but all of them were fundamentally unlike the present one; until close up to Milton they occurred in ages or times the cultural framework of which practically, or at least potentially, possessed the substantiality, plasticity and stalwartness that are requisite for a heroic poem, and which much rather lacked the creative urge, quality or leisure on the part of the poet to fill this framework with characters. The poetry of our age, however, has even lost heroic potentiality; its problem is that of how to adapt the epic purpose to what Bradley calls "a world of trousers, machinery and policemen"⁴.

Here certainly lies the most convincing explanation for the atrophy of the epic tradition: for the first time since the birth of poetry it seemed too hard a task to express "man's purpose" with the means this medium can afford. The progressive search into, and elucidation of, human experience and psychology on the one hand, the evanescence of epic simplicity and picturesqueness both of environment and action on the other, in conjunction

also with the growth of a new and stronger reading public outside the courts that favoured a type of man in whom it recognized its own every-day existence, all these circumstances inevitably rendered the portrayal of character more complicated, more differentiated, more analytical and—more prosaic; verse even failed to be the adequate vehicle of expression, because here the necessity of selecting the poetic, or of eliminating the unpoetic obstinately opposed a detailed exploitation of this new type of character.

The eighteenth-century novel is, if not an answer to the question of what happened to epic poetry proper, an explanation of how the epic purpose was in part taken over by a new medium of expression; it ensures, as it were, the continuation of the epic intention in a metamorphosed form. It tells of the fate of man by selecting one eminent representative, although this eminence is no longer that of rank, and by throwing him into the clash between his own will and that of his environment. Cast out into an unstable existence he endeavours to prove his own worth, to fulfil his purpose in the quest of true humanity. But the success or the failure of the hero is no longer measured by the mightiness of his deeds; it is certainly no longer the outcome of the struggle in arms with warring opponents which determine the extent of the hero's significance in the world, it is much rather the significance of the world itself which is disputed in the story of the development of the hero's character. Character becomes an antithesis within itself and reflects man's challenge to existence to reveal its purpose for him. In this process the hero is too exclusively preoccupied with his own problems to be able to act as a chief agent in some great cause, martial pomp and grand action disappear or become episodic. Divested of his traditional epic stature the hero loses his function as a director of masses, he is thrown back on his own spiritual individuality, and the volcano of powerful, violent action dies down to something which can no longer be seriously expressed in heroic verse.

In the consciousness of the time in which this metamorphosis of the epic spirit took place, the inevitability and momentousness of the process were not fully realized. The association of the eighteenth-century novel with the epic (as referred to, today, by Tillyard, Waldock and others) was not openly recognized in the first three quarters of the century. The bold statement that the novel might be called an epic in prose only appears in the late years of that epoch and without much comment as to its far-reaching significance.

Once we discover the fact that for a century after *Paradise Lost* the mutual independence and incommensurability between the epic poem and the novel were tacitly accepted as a matter of course, we cannot hesitate to accept the hypothesis that the epic of that period did not consider itself relieved of the task to adapt its traditional hero to the requirements of its own age; the concern for the leading personage of the most admired kind of poetry could

not have disappeared altogether from the consciousness of the period, and might conceivably have influenced the nature of all narrative poetry for a long time to come.

The question, what should become of the epic and its hero was in fact one which possessed the imaginations of poets and critics alike up to the time of the Romantics. The verse tales of Crabbe, Byron, Southey and Scott, though different from the formal tradition, are different only on account of the poets' intense preoccupation with it. They are conscious of it to a degree which would have been impossible, had not this tradition been kept alive throughout the previous century. All four feel as innovators or at least experimentors in new epic styles that are opposed to the practice of the eighteenth century, and it is only in relation to this practice and its failure that the coincidence of intention in four such dissimilar and individual poets can be explained.

It is in contrast and in response to the endeavours of epic formalism that Crabbe, in the preface, apologizes for representing in his *Tales* "actuality of relation", "nudity of description" and people of "naked and unveiled character" instead of having "employed his talents to some patriotic purpose" or instead of having sung "the heroic spirit of our countrymen"; it is also under the impression of the legitimate epic that he tries to ennoble his everyday characters as groups of people "whose adventures and pursuits might bear that kind of similitude to an Heroic Poem which these minor associations of men have in points of connection and importance with a regular and disciplined army"; it is also a thought derived from the authentic epic when he regrets the disappearance of heroic activity even from his rural scene in melancholy complaints such as this:

*Where are the swains, who, daily labour done,
With rural games play'd down the setting sun;
Who struck with matchless force the bounding ball,
Or made the pond'rous quoit obliquely fall;
While some huge Ajax, terrible and strong,
Engaged some artful stripling of the throng,
And fell beneath him, foil'd, while far around
Hoarse triumph rose, and rocks return'd the sound?
Where now are these⁵?*

Similarly, it must have been with a very vivid apprehension of the power of epic tradition that Byron directed his thoughts to writing a heroic poem on Bosworth Field, and it was again the result of a confrontation with the same tradition when after abandoning the project he thought it necessary, in his *Don Juan*, to ridicule in many places the same tradition as no longer binding:

*My poem's epic, and is meant to be
 Divided in twelve books; each book containing,
 With love, and war, a heavy gale at sea,
 A list of ships, and captains, and kings reigning,
 New characters; the episodes are three:
 A panoramic view of hell's in training
 After the style of Virgil and of Homer,
 So that my name of Epic's no misnomer⁶.*

It is also an expression of the search for a new hero in distinct opposition to the old one when Byron relates that when setting out to write his 'anti-epic' he had examined as prospective heroes also

*many of the military set,
 Exceedingly remarkable at times,
 But not at all adapted to my rhymes⁷.*

Behind his mask of cavil, Byron's intentions point in the same direction as those of Crabbe: it is an imperfect, tangibly human character he wants to create in protest against the aloofness of the heroic personage of the past. In his letters the term 'epic poem' appears as the opposite of 'human poem'⁸.

Then, there is Southey who begins with a poem in the epic tradition (*Joan of Arc*), but who in continuation of the controversy revolving round the legitimate hero asserts that "it is the common fault of epic poems, that we feel little interest for the heroes they celebrate"⁹ and that there should be "more of human feelings than is generally to be found in a warrior ...", "the good herdsman Eumaeus is worth a thousand heroes"¹⁰. 'More human' and, implicitly, 'more prosaic' are the keywords also of Southey, and they pull at the roots of heroism; but whereas Crabbe and Byron show determination enough to break completely with what they still admire at heart, Southey clings to tradition to an extent which exposes him to criticism based on Aristotle's precepts. He holds up the warrior-hero, particularly in *Joan of Arc*, *Madoc* and *Roderick*. But in order to ward off the flood of criticism, he verbally dissociates himself from Aristotle and pretends to have no epic intentions, although the contrary can be proved by passages from his *Book of Common-Place*. In his last verse tale, *Roderick*, Southey's equivocal position between tradition and revolution is demonstrated most characteristically: Roderick is still a great warrior, but only for the sake of the heroic touch and splendour. The real story is that of the hero's spiritual distress, that of a man who has erred and who is trying to regain paradise lost.

Thus Crabbe's, Byron's and Southey's heroes are akin to those of the eighteenth-century novel and thereby confess themselves to be parts of the epic metamorphosis. They are all Robinsons, or Tom Joneses, people set

adrift in the ocean of life, gaining or forfeiting salvation according to their acquired merit. The unity of the development of their characters has superseded the Aristotelian unity of grand action.

Scott shows a different aspect of the decline of the traditional epic. He intentionally resigns the supreme function of representing by it characters relevant to the spirit of his own age. He merely aims at relating an entertaining story and at displaying the customs and manners of a particular isolated group of people which he still knows from hearsay with the accuracy of the eyewitness. He disclaims verbally any epic merit and consciously narrows the scope of his narratives by writing poems as they might have been written in the past.

These remarks concerning the Romantic verse narrative are to underline the fact that in its astonishing dependence on, and consciousness of, the formal tradition, it is nothing but a late stage of a very animated and widespread controversy in the eighteenth century about the new hero, or, in its more radical aspects, the first outspoken acknowledgement of the death of the traditional hero since Milton.

Indeed, the whole age between Milton and the Romantics is characterized by the attempt to save or modify the authentic epic by inspiring its hero with its own ideals. If neoclassicism had not been so fervently active in the epic field, the history of the verse narrative would have taken a different course. It would certainly have taken a quicker and shorter one. As it is, neoclassicism retarded it for over a hundred years, nevertheless searching in new directions, and this, precisely, is sufficient argument to justify an examination of the epic and its theory in the eighteenth century as something actively contributing to the history of the long verse tale.

The difficulty of the search for the new hero, and also the merit of what was achieved, may be duly assessed if, on the one hand, we revert to the beginning of the crisis which can be fixed already within Milton's *Paradise Lost*, and if, on the other hand, we look at the latest stage of the discussion in our own century. We shall then realize that the problem of the decline, already heralded by Milton's poem, is still the same today, and that modern criticism—far from having solved it—is still largely caught up in those neoclassical syllogisms which we believe long since overcome.

At the beginning of the crisis Milton's genius created, and at the same time tried to solve, the dilemma, into which all subsequent generations of would-be epic poets were thrown. In *Paradise Lost*, for the first time, we feel the consciousness of a culture which is no longer satisfied with depicting heroic character as colourfully conspicuous against the background of an unquestioned existence, but which embarks on a quest for the meaning and purpose of the intricate relationship between man and existence. Both—from man's point of view—become variable and relative quantities and thus

create a desire to find out what makes them so. It is not the tangible but the unknown that occupies the poet's mind. It is for this reason that the real subject of *Paradise Lost* is not primarily its visible action, but the search for an absolute point of reference within the uncertainty of human existence. It means that the poet has to "justify the ways of God to men". At the end of his development in *Paradise Lost* man might have gained, as it were, the mere substance towards the developing of the proper stature of a hero in the old sense. But this is indeed 'another story', and Milton wisely stopped where, for over a century to come, others with ill success tried to start. The epic development is thus subtly anticipated in *Paradise Lost*: in abandoning Arthur as his epic hero and in treating of the fall of man Milton rejected the very essence of heroic poetry—the constant, spectacular character—in favour of one confronted with inward and outward distress (and this, of course, is applicable both to Adam and Eve and Satan). But thanks to the singular possibilities of this particular biblical subject, in which the sublime and the pettiness of human existence are so closely and naturally tied up with one another, Milton can tell us what is perhaps the only story in which God and man—because of their mutual, if unequal, integrity—are the components of a truly dramatic relationship. And thanks again to this 'natural' neighbourhood of God and man, Milton manages to conceal the littleness of man—which might have been productive of littleness in story—under a cloak of heroic tradition. This traditional portion of the poem, however, no longer constitutes the main theme; it is—in the terms of epic theory—episodical by-product. Nevertheless, Milton thus saved from the threat of atrophy, if not heroic poetry proper, a kind of poetry evoking heroic impressions; with a clever literary stratagem he procrastinated the end of a genre which in its traditional fashion had now become effete and would have assumed an air of anachronism. And this is highly significant of what was taking place within the epic field: even in Milton it is perceptible that where a spiritual problem becomes the centre of discussion because it is too complicated to be enacted, where the epic of heroic action merges into an epic of problematic character, the conventional raw-material is deprived of its significance and degraded to the function of mere theatrical props.

Contrary to Milton who succeeded in appearing heroic, and contrary to the neoclassical epoch which shattered its own belief in heroism by writing inferior heroic poems, the twentieth-century epic poem merely exists in the abstract as the subject of discussion. But the motives of this discussion are still those which made Milton's poem what it is. The argument, now more outspoken perhaps, is still about what the modern epic poem might have to look like under the impact of unheroic character.

We should like to begin our examination of the epic decline with an appreciation of this latest stage of criticism because:

1. We are thus made familiar, through the examples of a more appreciable phase of development, with the fatal uncertainty in the conception of the epic hero which is the prime cause of the long-drawn decline and metamorphosis and which, since the eighteenth century failed to realize it, could not be explained so convincingly without this late evidence;
2. because we can see that the danger of definition and ensuing formalism looms large behind the apparent liberality of modern criticism, producing abstract formulae with inherent contradictions similar to those of neo-classicism, and because
3. we hereby gain valid comparative matter that will enable us to treat the eighteenth century with adequate objectiveness.

We shall then proceed to examine the neoclassical epic in theory and practice and finally characterize in a comparative study the position of Milton's *Paradise Lost* as the first and, at the same time, the last example of a really modern 'heroic' poem.

In this way we hope to show what, in the time of its crisis, the epic was, what became of it, and why it ceased to be.

*Twentieth-Century Criticism as a Direct and Indirect
Reflection of the Epic Crisis*

A comparative study of twentieth-century criticism, scanty in its appearance, conveys a revealing picture of the epic crisis. Until well into the nineteenth century the controversy had been sustained more or less vigorously on the grounds of traditionally narrow epic criteria, and inflated and kept alive by the artificial respiration which Romantic historical and exotic interest could afford. Towards the end of the century, the essays of Nettleship, Wasson and others heralded the inevitable reappraisal of the species; it became virtually impossible for the critics to ignore any longer the predicament into which Milton's precedent had thrown all subsequent writers of epic poetry. The revaluation became all the more imperative in the face of an apparently complete cessation of any practical attempts. The task which the critics faced was a delicate one and promised no satisfactory solution, since it necessitated a considerable dissociation from the Homeric and even Virgilian models. Therefore the works which, above and beyond mere historical criticism and aesthetic deliberations on the extant poems, concern themselves with the epic as an abstract form of poetry and try to bring in line the traditional requirements with modern demands, are scarce in comparison with eighteenth or even nineteenth-century criticism. With Clark, Dixon, Abercrombie, Ker, Bradley, Bowra and Tillyard we have nearly exhausted the list of significant authors on the subject, and it is a rather characteristic symptom of the real state of affairs when Tillyard begins the most recent important book on the epic with these words: "It may seem an act of folly to write today on the epic at all".

But even of the authors we have mentioned, it may be said that their attempts at finding new, satisfactory formulae for the genre are—with the exception perhaps of Tillyard—peripheral and vague; they mostly resort to those few suggestive examples which for the period of time embraced by Homer and Milton yield an applicable set of safe epic criteria, and therefore approach the problem of any progressive epic development with a marked historical bias. If we look up the word 'epic' in the *Oxford Companion to English Literature* we find: "Epic, an, a poem that celebrates in the form of a continuous narrative the achievements of one or more heroic personages of history or tradition." Now this is a definition which, although apparently meant to cover the whole history of literature, is unquestionably inadequate and even useless with regard to Milton's poem. Another example in the

same style, more detailed and proportionately more absurd, is this: "The Epic is a calm and dignified narrative in uniform and majestic verse of a momentous action in which heroic characters and supernatural beings take part under the control of the Supreme Being or of destiny ... The theme is generally political and martial, involving the material welfare of a people or of peoples ... The hero is either supernatural or of exalted personality and power ...". This definition could have been given by any eighteenth-century critic; in no way does it account for the necessary change in modern times from heroic to merely epic character; it clings to the worn-out and irrelevant paraphernalia of epic tradition with no more justification than we could find in demanding a king or a chorus for the tragedy. Obviously we remain completely and probably intentionally within the limits of historical formalism, and similarly, quite a number of other critics shy back from mentioning the awkward fact that their definitions have only relative validity. They judge of the epic metamorphosis in a negative way, i. e. they select from the works after Milton what seems to conform at least in some decisive measure to their traditional technical and aesthetic conceptions. Thus, nearly all extensive and quasi-comprehensive modern histories of the epic—by drawing a more or less sharp line where these conceptions begin to lose their validity—relate the history of a development which has come to a close. On the other hand those works which treat of the epic crisis in a more detailed manner, content themselves with stating the facts as evident in a few modern examples without paying much attention to the origins of the development. Bradley's essay "The Long Poem in the Age of Wordsworth" and, with less merit, Thompson's "Farewell to Achilles" may be mentioned in this context. The ways, then, in which the problem is tackled are in themselves indirect manifestations of the awkwardness of the whole issue and the kind of criticism in which it results.

The question which had alone been answered by Milton (indeed at the logical point of time, though prematurely from the point of view of the history of epic poetry), the question how straight epic action could be represented by unheroic characters, and how individual and universal issues could be artistically reconciled in a hero of contemporary significance (although perhaps in the form of an ancient or legendary hero), has thrown an almost insurmountable obstacle in the way of the modern critics. It is the very question that forces them to split up into two principal schools of thought which not only mutually contradict one another but, not infrequently, even themselves. In many cases, these contradictions are not only as ludicrous as those of the neoclassical school, but also caused by similar logical processes.

Neoclassical epic theory, without any great difficulty as to the choice of the type of hero, was in a position to give concrete and distinct suggestions

for the chief actor of such a poem. Not because it particularly indulged in an interest in historical individuality—on the contrary, the bearing and conduct of the hero were contemporary and universal rather than archaeological—but because the hero's ultimate function was to stand as an incontestable, unassailable, ethical and moral entity which, though in the abstract, was without much discussion thought to be best represented by warlike heroes and kings. In the twentieth century the universal meaning of the epic hero, though abstract still, became less incontestable, less absolute than in the eighteenth; morality and destiny were more and more thrown open to discussion rather than to description; stress was shifted from representation to interpretation, from action to reaction whilst many, if not most, critics would now like to convince us that the old hero is capable of taking over this burden of introversion without jeopardizing his heroic nature. A few examples will be sufficient to elucidate this dilemma. According to Clark, the epic poet is not merely a narrator of action and valour but an "interpreter of human life"³. Similarly, Bradley requires the poet to give us a "criticism or interpretation of life"⁴. Bowra points out that post-heroic poetry "tends to give a new dimension to its story by making it in some sense symbolical or allegorical, an illustration of important metaphysical issues. The heroes are not only themselves ..."⁵, or literary epics are "not content to present individuals as such, they present something that is more like a symbol or even an ideal, a person who represents something else"⁶. In the words 'something else' there is implied the modern quest for 'the real theme' which plays such an important part in the Milton controversy, a meaning which can only be unveiled by piercing "the surface of things to their real and abiding significance ..."⁷. It is easy to conceive that the congruity of the hero and what he stands for is the more dangerously disturbed, the more one attaches prime importance not to what he does but to what his doings mean; it becomes also disturbed when these two integral parts of the final value of the literary hero drift apart in chronology, i. e. if the poet has to express modern feeling in men of bygone ages. Abercrombie, who most emphatically favours the philosophical functions of the epic, expatiates at length on the importance of an interpretation of valid human experience and existence. The epic must be "inspired by some vital import"⁸ and must therefore avoid the danger of making its hero appear an actor in a setting of merely archaeological import like, for instance, Morris's *Sigurd the Volsung*. Indirectly the position of the traditional epic hero is hereby questioned and the immediate narrowness of 'modern traditional epic' implied. Valid epic heroes are to be characters "in whom the whole virtue and perhaps the whole failure of living seems superhumanly concentrated"⁹. Abercrombie undoubtedly speaks with regard to Milton's practice. The action is no longer an illustration of a victorious hero in a victorious cause,

let alone a hero fighting for his personal glory, but the vehicle for an indirect or even direct discussion of human existence. If the prevailing conceptions and conditions, the 'Zeitgeist', should demand it, this discussion may well have to deal with failure. It is interesting to see that Abercrombie avoids discussing the practical consequences of a presentation of 'failure of living', for which it might be difficult to find a hero of 'superhuman' stature. But this is again a result of the ever widening gap between the type of actor that is convenient for poetic management and the abstract issues he is supposed to 'enact'. Abercrombie's remark appears as a natural deduction within the new trend, but is hastily dispensed with in view of the difficulties the choice of a hero is likely to create. Immediately the 'abstract epic'—a byword of modern criticism reserved for the eighteenth century!—is thus brought into being: there is little help in Abercrombie's formula, according to which the epic poet is "symbolising in some appropriate form whatever sense of the significance of life he feels acting as the accepted unconscious metaphysic of his age¹⁰". In a vacuum, of course, this line of thought may efficiently be carried on because it manoeuvres us carefully round the crucial point; the difficulty arises as soon as we probe this 'appropriate form'—a large part of which is made up by the hero—to its factual substance, and so in practice we are still at a loss for an answer. Abercrombie himself unconsciously, and even more distinctly, points out the flaw in his scheme when he says that "not to declare what happened, and the results of what happened is the object of an epic, but to accept all this as the mere material in which a single artistic purpose, a unique, vital symbolism may be shaped¹¹"; the raw material, the story and its actor, the very crux of modern epic writing, is conveniently brushed aside, although the really important 'meaning' of the poem has to be conveyed by them. Of the story Abercrombie therefore simply says that it should be "good¹²"!

The abstract demands made on the epic by Abercrombie undoubtedly eliminate the kind of heroic character who is solely concerned with the problems of visible action. Instead, they suggest a man who, owing to his awareness of the things behind things, is bound to be a reflective, meditative type. If he were to act unaware of the undercurrents and phenomena of existence, yet employed as their agent, he would certainly at once lose his stature, his dramatic or tragical weight and sink to the level of a mere puppet. In the first case, however, the hero cannot preeminently be a warrior, a fighter against armies at the head of armies, but must needs be a fighter in the battle of existence; he would have to grapple—as already Wasson well puts it—with "something eternally antithetic to moral order and unity", or "somewhat with which the heart of man cannot be reconciled¹³". Abercrombie means quite the same thing when he says that the hero would be caught up in the "eternal contradiction" between the will of man

and the will of destiny¹⁴. In fact he describes his hero as “conscious not only of the sense of his own destined being but also of some sense of that which destines¹⁵”.

These dialectic properties of the hero's character cannot be represented exclusively by heroic action or movement. The hero may become inactive over large parts of the poem and thus jeopardize his heroism, or the poet may occasionally step in to explain, to comment. Therefore, the argument as to how far thought may be permitted to encroach on the poetry of action (and to alter it accordingly) and in what form, naturally suggests itself to modern criticism. Although it is inevitable, owing to the tug between simplicity of narration and complexity of interpretation, we feel all the time rather poignantly that it is an argument concerning something that is insoluble. Knowing the difficulty of representing that complexity by action only, Clark, for instance, concedes that “the epic manner can well admit of a transfusion of allusiveness and self-consciousness¹⁶” and speaks of the “personal intrusion that is permitted in modern epic¹⁷”; the concession is not made with enthusiasm, and we feel that this transfusion is foreign matter which we do not want, but have to accept. Dixon, not wholly inappropriately, of course, objects to it altogether and marks down this tendency as the very cause of the epic decline, although it is the decline rather that necessitates the intrusion. He also seems to forget that the whole issue is much more a matter of choice between two evils: depreciation of narrative in favour of thought, or depreciation of thought in favour of narrative. Bowra, too, admits that thought is more important than action, “the mere story is less important than what it represents in the poet's vision of life¹⁸”. As an example of the ultimate consequence this development is apt to lead to, we may quote a most striking instance in this context: Abercrombie's confession which runs counter to his explicit request for a ‘good story’: “The conclusion seems to be that the epic purpose will have to abandon the necessity of telling a story¹⁹”. Here we have one of those perfect ‘contradictiones in adjecto’ in which the discussion so often results; contradictions which arose as a matter of course ever since Milton destroyed the epic in its traditional purpose. We want a good story, but other things are so important that there is no room for it. Dixon is wide awake to this danger; he is speaking under the influence of Bradley's remarks about the inferiority of the long poems of the nineteenth century which he ascribes in his turn to the predominantly intellectual and analytical mood of our age. In his conservative ideas he seems strangely blind to the necessity of this development. He declares that when the epic “becomes more and more taken up with ideas, more with character in itself than with character displayed through deeds, more with motives than with what has happened” (which is the absolute contradiction to Abercrombie's ‘not what happened ...’ etc.), “more with

what can be seen by the eye of the mind than what has been or can be seen by the bodily eye, no magic of words can save it²⁰”, and although he admits that Bradley’s arguments seem conclusive, he ignores them by advocating the traditional hero; in other words: he clings to the traditional epic pattern for reasons concerning the narrative, at the same time admitting—by endorsing Bradley’s theories—that our age is no longer interested in that pattern. Once he has accepted the fact that his epic would in all likelihood be one of ‘archaeological import’, he can of course fall back on heroes more truly heroic, heroes that are described by Ker as men who are “left free to declare themselves in their own way, unhampered by any burden of history, any purpose or moral apart from the events that are played out in the dramatic clashing of one will against another²¹”.

Here we have the reverse of the coin: the claim for simple, physical action. What used to be a matter of course, however, an undisputed axiom, now becomes a source of contradiction, and the fact that this claim has to be put forward with anxious emphasis, and against tendencies to the opposite effect, shows that the traditional chief actor has lost his poetical integrity. If we keep in mind the abstract propositions in the issue as put forward by Abercrombie, we feel the insidious nature of the concrete ones that accompany them:

Thus Clark, the first representative of the conservative school in this century, demands of the epic “life-like largeness of men in action²²”, “the many-sidedness of the large and outward life²³”. Clark lays down these precepts with very much the same exclusiveness and onesidedness of outlook as Abercrombie emphasizes his. The epic hero himself, according to Clark, is unquestionably “a worker in the open²⁴”, “we need actors that in a measure spin the action out of their own body and mind, that are at all events creative in their energy, and not mere incident-driven passivities ..., men fit to mould events to their purpose or even to give fate a ringing fall²⁵”.

This conception is clearly opposed to that of the metaphysical school and cannot escape being one that is only valid for the past, although it would like to be binding also for the present. Milton, once again, falls by the wayside without being accounted for. In Clark’s epic, the dualism in the existence of man is reconciled, his character ceases to be a problem and, as an entity, simply becomes the motive power behind problems of outward action. If Abercrombie speaks for the needs of the modern mind and in the process loses sight of the more concrete aspects, Clark’s statement squares with past practice but overlooks the needs of the modern mind. The result with Clark is a deadlock similar to that found in Abercrombie: commenting on the availability in our time of that kind of active representation which he deems necessary for epic poetry, he comes to the conclusion that “the epic

repertory is empty²⁶"; which means that, at the same time, he tells us what the poet ought to do and that it cannot be done. The fact that we find a similar kind of contradiction in the early eighteenth century proves that the crisis is a very acute and longstanding one indeed, and that the superiority of modern criticism is less indisputable than might appear at first sight.

Owing to the dilemma created by thought and action, the discussion of the epic hero moves along rather general lines, and he becomes a quite disembodied being altogether. A solid answer could only be given if the synthesis between the two conflicting quantities could be achieved. If not, any practical suggestion would naturally tend to clamour for or against the warrior-hero of epic tradition.

Dixon, within his self-imposed heroic isolation, is the only one who can unreservedly propagate the warrior, the general, the prince, the king. (Even Clark, in several respects Dixon's forerunner, refrains from committing himself verbally and simply wants an agent in "an action that is lofty and long²⁷"). Dixon's conclusions are equally remarkable both for their courage and their naïveté. In his conception of the epic hero as "a man of deeds not of feelings, whose inner life is without hesitation²⁸", he divests him in his turn of all 'consciousness of the eternal contradiction' with which Abercrombie endows him. The central figure must be a great man, because "the grandeur of the Colossus, the grandeur of Sphinx or pyramid belongs to a poem sustained through twelve or twenty books²⁹". He justifies his choice of character not only on the grounds of his own observations and technical requirements but also on the strength of such a narrow, established practice which once again excludes Milton: "Epic, for instance, one notices, usually depicts a victorious hero. It cannot do well otherwise. For in such a poem the interest is rather national than individual³⁰". "True epic is national poetry³¹", he says elsewhere. "The hero represents a country or a cause which triumphs with his triumph, whose honour would suffer from his defeat³²". This is an astonishing piece of lingering neoclassical formalism and, for that matter, not an erratic one. Just as in the eighteenth century, the hero is looked upon as the personification of a cause in political life, not life itself, and therefore Dixon is bound in spirit to adhere to the neoclassical precept of the fortunate hero, because "the failure of the epic hero would it not have the character of a national disaster³³?"

The opportunities for the portrayal of a complex character, let alone of the problems that are naturally nascent in it (and which might indeed not be creative of spectacular action) are not many in this framework. The hero has to be uniform and consistent enough not to allow these personal problems to ask for their solution more imperatively than is good for the cause. Since the "epic hero is always a fighter, a soldier in some good cause³⁴", he has indeed no time for his own problems; in order to live up to the immense

responsibilities incumbent on him he has to be an 'accomplished' character from the outset with perhaps just as much human tether as not to render him uniformly dull. Dixon therefore lays down as a general formula that "true epic, wherever created, will be a narrative poem dealing with great actions and great characters³⁵". It is not without irony that we see him forced to explode his own theories as soon as he leaves his guarded isolation and admits the modern difficulties into the picture, exclaiming in what sounds rather like comic despair: "Let there be one single hero, or a great many, happy or unfortunate; furious as Achilles or pious as Aeneas: let them be kings or generals or neither of them³⁶". Dixon thus adds to the list of contradictions in terms which emerge from the epic question with peculiar frequency.

The ideal character or near-perfect hero which is implied in most of Dixon's statements is indicative of another instance in the modern controversy, and just as the ideas differ with regard to simplicity and complexity of character and representation of abstract propositions, so the preference or rejection of a pattern of virtue is maintained. Dixon, from his conservative point of view, declares that we have to fall back on the nobility and grandeur of the Greek epic; the moral character of this grandeur is indirectly defined by his claim for the good cause of which the hero is the chief representative. No character-drawing can approximate perfection without exhibiting the quality of ideality, says Clark³⁷, although, on the other hand, he has to admit that "goodness in men is often, from the point of view of picturesqueness, uninteresting³⁸". In any case moral instruction, the preaching of morals, or, as the classicists put it: to inspire love of virtue, is not the essence of epic poetry; the poet is "no preacher; he has no rousing message for loiterers in virtue, no theorem in ethics to demonstrate³⁹". Tillyard only advocates that kind of sanity in the hero which is able "to measure the crooked by the straight⁴⁰". The liberality of Abercrombie in asking for an interpretation of whatever sense of life is felt to be most influential naturally admits of more scope: beside a tragic or frustrated hero a plainly unideal one is perfectly imaginable. The indications of an unconventional hero are perhaps strongest in Abercrombie's criticism. This is enhanced by the importance he attaches to a relevant cultural setting, or at least to a setting which in some way or other can be accepted as still comparable with the contemporary one. For the traditional hero it is indeed an unrewarding task to make his personality appear plausible in an environment that with its modern philosophy becomes alien to him and his purpose. Similarly, it would be a difficult task for modern man to appear as such in the traditional heroic environment. Both hero and environment, therefore, had better be modern; "great epic poetry will always frankly accept the social conditions within which it is composed⁴¹"; the epic poet is "accepting, and with his

genius transfiguring, the general circumstance of his time⁴²". That for our time the splendour of a battlefield and its heroic features are hardly the prime concern, need not be emphasized.

With these remarks on direct and indirect allusions to the identity of the epic hero, we find ourselves in the middle of the process which caused the old synonyms of 'epic' and 'heroic' poetry to disintegrate, and which really started when Milton called his poem "more heroic⁴³", meaning 'other than heroic in the martial sense of the word'. No attempt will ever succeed in establishing Milton's poem as a heroic one by padding up what little heroism there is to be found in it. It represents the epic spirit in its first stage of metamorphosis and is simply superbly epic. The nuance is perceptible in *Abercrombie*; if for technical reasons he demands "some great story⁴⁴", he nevertheless intimates that its hero would not be a warrior, because "we cannot go on with courage as the solitary valuation of life⁴⁵". Bowra may equally well be quoted in this context, whose statements—though meant to discuss the transition from authentic to literary epic—can be applied to the modern crisis: "The writers of literary epic set themselves a task of uncommon difficulty when they tried to adapt the heroic ideal to unheroic times⁴⁶", for like most modern critics he expects the epic to do "much more than present types and symbols of human nobility⁴⁷". Bowra, who over and above the philosophical function emphasizes the importance of a lively narrative for epic poetry, has to concede that the poet is no longer to describe the "doings and excellence of individual men⁴⁸"; there is more range and promise in his prospective gallery of heroes when he says that it is "equally possible to enjoy their oddity or their charm, or their humour or their improbability or their moral worth⁴⁹", although the list sounds rather arbitrary and is meant to remind us simply of things other than heroic worth. Bowra, too, has to pay tribute to the modern dilemma, however, pointing out that as soon as the integrity and the prowess of the individual disappear, and with them the illustrious central figure who is best suited to dominate such a long poem, we should, to the detriment of the story, have to put up with a hero who is "becoming more human than a hero can legitimately be⁵⁰". Another contradiction in terms: we want a truly human character but it would be better to have a superhuman one.

The apparent insolubility of the whole problem within the limits of epic poetry proper is sufficiently exposed in the examples here given. A sound critical assessment of these inevitable contradictions on the background of our own peculiar society and culture cannot fail to do away with the conception of a historically known hero, or event, as the only possible epic material. A fictitious action with fictitious characters can perfectly well fulfil the epic requirements as long as by representing things profoundly human, thoughts profoundly human, emotions profoundly human, they

gain the amplitude and depth of a picture in which we recognize ourselves and our existence. The abandonment of verse, in the process, is only a necessary adaptation, not the negation of the epic purpose.

At this point, it may be of special interest to see the position which Tillyard takes up in the dispute. We might have referred to him under the previous headings, as he says much that coincides with what either of the two main parties can offer. But thanks to his more realistic outlook, he manages not to get trapped in their contradictory formalism; he ventures to give the name of 'epic' to certain prose works and unconventional verse-tales which in fact have taken over from the province of heroic verse the task of giving a new interpretation of recognizably human existence. This automatically entails the necessity for differentiation between epic and heroic. The fact that he calls this differentiation 'unusual' goes to show how stubbornly this equation is still rooted in the consciousness of our time: "I use the word epic in an unusual way; more especially I do not equate it with heroic. It is very difficult not to fall into the habit of equating them, partly because we tend to derive our ideas of epic from the poems of Homer, which happen to be heroic as well as epic, and not from the *Divine Comedy*, which is epic without being heroic; partly because there lingers in our mind the idea that only the primitive is truly epic, and in primitive times it is mainly the heroic strain that has sufficient seriousness to have an initial chance of qualifying as epic⁵¹". Tillyard modifies the heroic conception and adapts it to our time with the result that although the epic hero need not be warrior or prince, he ought to convey a heroic mood. It is a modern paraphrase of the Miltonic "more heroic". Tillyard refers to, and accepts, Abercrombie's conception of the metaphysical validity of the epic, but formulates rather more concretely, that it is to express "the feelings of a large group of people living in or near his [the poet's] own time⁵²"; this is the function which he terms the 'choric character' of an epic. The absence of an exact definition of the modern hero does not impair the practicability of his propositions because in the application of the choric principle to our times on the one hand, and in bestowing on some of Defoe's and Fielding's characters the status of epic heroes on the other, he unmistakably refutes the necessity for the traditional chief actor and gives second-hand examples of the new one. That these ideas render necessary the emancipation from the heroic medium proper is a fact which we can hardly fail to accept because it alone answers the problem in question and provides an opening for further developments. Tillyard's conclusion is that "in the eighteenth century, prose fiction began potentially to be the best epic medium invading what had been mainly the province of verse. In sum the choric nature of the epic does not dictate any rigidly answering form⁵³". Tillyard only hints at this metamorphosis; he thus defines his book as a history

of past epic practice, but leaves room for speculation on the further development.

To sum up: most of the critics of the twentieth century do not allow for the changes which were taking place after the time of Milton, but try either to justify the old epic style or to equip it in theory with the modern conceptions. It is exactly what the classicists did also in practice. Thus the result—varying according to whether the traditional or modern requirements are being stressed—is a strange oscillation between anachronistic formalism and perplexed liberalism. Witness the following two examples: “There is little quarrel about the epic” (!), says Bowra, “an epic poem is by common consent a narrative of some length and deals with events that have a certain grandeur and importance and come from a life of action, especially of violent action, such as war”; but he hastens to add that, on the other hand, “no rules are binding, and it is dangerous to be too precise in saying what a thing is or what it ought to be⁵⁴”. Dixon declares that “any narrative poetry, if it be sufficiently impressive, is epic⁵⁵”, but expresses his doubts as to “whether success has in any large measure attended upon the departure from the formal tradition⁵⁶”.

We may arrive at a more balanced picture of the potential modern epic if we study more closely the failure of that formal tradition, if we do not carelessly brush aside the epics of the eighteenth century as ‘bad poetry’, and if, at a later stage, we do not rashly exclude as ‘unepic’ Southey’s Roderick because he has “too little real outwardness⁵⁷”, or Crabbe’s *Tales* because they are devoid of epic splendour⁵⁸, or Byron’s Don Juan because he is “destitute of heroic qualities⁵⁹”, or Browning’s *The Ring and the Book* because it exhibits “human character” instead of action⁶⁰, or Morris’s *Sigurd the Volsung* as it is “an attempt to write epic poetry as it might have been written⁶¹”, or Tennyson’s *Idylls of the King* because their theme is “to shadow sense at war with soul⁶²”. The moment these exclusions are made, the critic confesses himself to be a formalist, and indicates that he is only concerned with that kind of epic poetry the history of which, as we have said, came to an end with Milton.

The reasons which produced unsatisfactory and inconclusive results both in eighteenth-century and twentieth-century criticism, are essentially the same. Whether consciously or unconsciously, these results reflect the undeniable fact that the age-old ties between the epic hero and what he stood for, are loosened and severed beyond repair. In both cases the hero has to stand for ‘something else’, for a kind of glory which, though marked by the differences of different ages, symbolizes the conception people have of life in its absolute value. Already in the eighteenth century this glory was far from being that of the authentic epic hero. But it took over a hundred years of theory and practice to reach this conclusion.

The Neoclassical Theory of the Epic Hero

I. A REVALUATION OF THE NEOCLASSICAL CONCEPTION OF THE EPIC

In dealing with the conception of the epic hero in the eighteenth century we shall do well to keep in mind what the lingering classicism of twentieth-century criticism so forcibly leads us to suspect: that the existence of this conception was by no means restricted to the literary and aesthetic horizons of that particular century. Its main problem, the invention of a valid, modern hero, caused it to survive indefinitely, because it had not nearly been exhausted, let alone been solved. There was simply nothing by which it could be replaced in the way, for instance, Collins's or Pope's poetry could be replaced by that of Shelley or Keats. This accounts for the direct link between eighteenth- and twentieth-century epic theory which is so clearly discernible and which does not exist in drama or poetry. We must therefore look on eighteenth-century theory, not as something self-contained and historically isolated like much else of the literature of that time, but as an incomplete and uncompleted approach to the same, ever-unsolved question of the epic purpose and its embodiment. It is the question which, though approached in a different temper, is the touchstone of the discussion even today. The main reason why we today erroneously dissociate the nature of neoclassical epic writing from our own conceptions, and the reason, too, why we see the former as something ludicrously inferior, lie chiefly in the fact that the classicists, less aware of, or unaware of, the incipient crisis, by way of frequent practice exposed themselves to that derision which can be warded off by the modern conservative theoreticians solely by abstaining from putting their own ideas into practice.

Now this certain continuity of largely conventional epic theory between the eighteenth century and today suggests various important conclusions which in effect necessitate certain amendments to our conception of the neoclassical age. The essential one is this:

In speaking of epic poetry we have to disregard most of the generalizing ideas about the supersession of neoclassical precepts by so-called Romantic ones. The contribution of eighteenth-century Romanticism to the development of the formal epic was negligible and is characterized by a soundly neoclassical conception with regard to the hero; we shall occasionally have to refer to this peculiarity. There is a marked tendency to push the date of the disintegration and devaluation of neoclassical theories further and further

back and to prove the presence or predominance of Romantic currents and undercurrents even in the early eighteenth century. Hamelius, in his "Kritik in der englischen Literatur des 17. und 18. Jahrhunderts" claims to see the beginnings of an essentially Romantic conception of the epic in Addison's criticism of *Paradise Lost*, an attitude which rests on little more than the fact that Addison condescends to deal with an epic which, in the eyes of many of his contemporaries, was no epic at all, since it failed to be purely heroic or what was, in their eyes, Aristotelian. Hamelius speaks of "die steigende Schlagfertigkeit der romantischen Kritik, welche seit Addisons Milton-Studien die angreifende Partei in der englischen Literatur war¹". In the age of Pope Pope's enemies "rüttelten an den Fundamenten des Neoklassizismus und erschütterten das ganze Gebäude²". "Als Johnson für die neoklassische Kritik eintrat, war sie schon beinahe aufgelöst und überwunden³". In the wake of Hamelius, S. Christiani repeats this cliché by stating that "um die Mitte des 18. Jahrhunderts war die pseudoklassizistische kritische Schule im wesentlichen überwunden, die Romantiker brachen mit allen Überlieferungen ihrer Vorgänger und verwirklichten endgültig ihre Ideale⁴". I also remember a lecture by Mr. L. Lerner of The Queen's University in Belfast in which he came to the conclusion that even Pope himself was 'untypical' of neoclassicism since he could be proved to deprecate rules. This simply goes to show that our popular conception of this age is an abstract one in that we expect all its manifestations to live up to its most conspicuous characteristic, that of prescribed authority, whereas the very existence of what is called the Romantic element of the eighteenth century constitutes, together with the rational element, 'typical neoclassicism'. Gayley conforms with the accepted opinion that pseudoclassicism which started in the seventeenth century "extends to the middle of the eighteenth century", only adding a tentative "if not further⁵". Tillyard, to round off the picture, states that "the neoclassic conception ceased to be effective towards the end of the eighteenth century ...⁶". The general impression thus given is that, although the neoclassical ideal cannot unreservedly be said to have disappeared by the middle of the eighteenth century, it has certainly done so in the second half.

This idea is untenable. It may be true for certain literary developments—it is certainly not true for epic poetry, and epic poetry, in the eyes of that time, was the supreme species of literature. Owing to what we called the unsolved question of the epic hero, the discussion of epic poetry was characterized, even at the end of the century, by the same controversial spirit which was typical of the early century, and although the solution was no longer sought for on purely Aristotelian criteria (which had hardly ever been the case anyway), these were at least as important as the unconventional ones and, when it came to the central issue, the hero himself, usually the

decisive ones. The flow of reverent neoclassical tributes paid to the epic at the beginning of the eighteenth century as 'the most outstanding work of art the human mind is capable of conceiving' was kept up almost undisturbedly till 1800 and after, and the conceptions that inspired this awe in 1700 as well as in 1800 were completely and absolutely identical: conceptions that were formed by Homeric and Virgilian example, explained by Aristotle and modified by the eighteenth-century mind. Witness the following two examples representing between them a gap of over a hundred years:

1. "It is, however, so difficult to maintain the poetic idiom at all times, in executing so comprehensive a plan as that of the *Epopoea*, that I consider it as almost impossible."

2. "To write an epic poem is a work of that difficulty, that no one for near seventeen hundred years past has succeeded in it."

To enhance the peculiarity of the situation we have given first place to the critic who wrote in 1801 (J. Ogilvie) and second place to the critic who wrote in 1695 (R. Blackmore). The two statements are chronologically interchangeable. They may appear to say little about the epic, but to the student of the eighteenth century they are unmistakable manifestations of the very attitude we previously described. They both imply that only two men have written epic poems, Homer and Virgil, that any modern attempt would naturally follow the same lines, that Dante, Camoens and Milton are not really epic writers and that the supreme end of epic poetry is the portrayal of a hero who, but for his national dress, could move amongst Ulysses, Aeneas and Achilles without being stared at. The absolute congruity of sentiment in these two critics is solidly backed up by their respective practice: Blackmore's *Prince Arthur* (1695) and Ogilvie's *Britannia* (1801), from whose prefaces we quoted, are, as epic poems, identical and interchangeable both in spirit and matter. We feel nothing of an apologetic character about Ogilvie's attempt to write an epic poem in the neoclassical tradition. The audacity lies not in what, to our abstract conception of neoclassicism, appears to be a very late example, but in the author's nerve in challenging once more the impregnable position of the ancients. The declining state of the English epic at that time should not blind us to the fact that the epic itself still enjoyed a supreme reputation. The decline was indeed registered with considerable mortification but looked upon as something caused by the incompetence of bad writers rather than by any anachronistic properties of the heroic strain. The epic as such was not questioned: it was something sublime dragged into the dust, not by changing social conditions, but by mediocre talent. The difference is fundamental.

The fact that the classicists, in the middle of the process of decline, did not, or not fully, realize its origin, explains why this astonishingly vigorous

survival of neoclassical conceptions was at all possible, and indicates that it was an unconscious rather than conscious struggle on the part of those writers to rise victorious over their doomed species. But the uniformity of appearance which we today believe to perceive is deceptive and misleading. At first glance, indeed, we get a general impression of stagnation within the epic field, and we notice that the realization of a new relevant leading character, a 'human' one, as Byron later called it, was singularly slow in coming about. On the surface again we also notice that, as a result of ideas invariably revolving round the warrior as the accepted hero, most definitions of the epic share that peculiarly unchanging, stereotyped vocabulary that characterizes even some of the modern ones; definitions of which the following—chosen at random—may be called 'typical':

"An Epic or Heroic Poem is a Discourse formed upon a Story partly real and partly feigned, representing some one glorious and fortunate action, that is distinguished by a variety of wonderful, yet probable and pleasing events, and delivered in verse by way of Narration, in a sublime and flowing style, to form the manners and inflame the mind with love of virtue".

To explain the potentiality of neoclassical criticism and practice by giving their definitions is, however, a futile undertaking. A definition condenses to a short formula what may have been reached by a plurality of different approaches, and it is indeed this plurality of approaches, not the final definition, that reveals the real struggle of those writers against the death of the hero. If, on the surface, we get the impression of a petrified state of affairs, of a conformity of outlook and intention, it is certainly only the outward appearance; the Trojan Horse, as it were, but not its potential contents. In reality (this is the second main point we should like to emphasize), neo-classical theory, and even more so neoclassical practice, are extremely controversial; there is a strong fermentation within self-imposed limits. In spite of their reverence for the great masters, the ideas of those eighteenth-century writers are basically different. Their belief in classical rules is in reality the belief in their own wilful interpretation of them, and it is again and again given up under the pressure of contemporary influences. As it is the very essence of neoclassical formalism to be controversial and contradictory in itself, we may find statements in the early years of the century which, according to popular assumption, we should expect to find rather later, and vice versa. Indeed it would be easy enough to show that, for instance, Blackmore's *Alfred* (1723) is in more than one way less Aristotelian and less conventional than, say, Wilkie's *Epigoniad* or Glover's *Atheniad* written several decades later.

However, contrary to what is commonly assumed, epic theory and practice do not represent a recognizably linear evolution. The circumstance that prevented them from being a history of gradual development was the almost

unanimous adherence to the conventional warrior as the only legitimate leading character; but a type of warrior who is nevertheless different from the hero of authentic epic, because to all intents and purposes he is a figure meant to be valid for the age in which he was conceived. That an angry Achilles or a weeping Aeneas was no longer desirable was almost an obsession with those critics, and as there was no conclusive and convincing result, the search for the new hero steadily progressed throughout the whole century. Even if the warrior was tacitly accepted as the central epic figure (or indeed because he was accepted as such), a considerable amount of artistic consequences were tied up in an author's decision to place at the head of his poem a) a man that history knew little about, b) a man whose life was well known and thereby automatically restricted the writer's inventive possibilities, c) a Greek or a national hero with their respective cultural backgrounds, d) a man who commanded his armies on the field of battle and by his powerful voice, e) a man who commanded his armies from behind a desk, bent over a map, f) a man who defeated his enemy with his sword in mortal combat, g) a man who ordered his cannon to destroy an indiscriminate mass of enemies, h) a woman who could not appear on the field of battle at all, or i) a woman who nevertheless did, j) a man who had the active support of the heavens, and if so, whether the celestial beings were to be Christian or heathen, k) a man who had to be represented as completely self-sufficient and without the decorative help of celestial machinery, l) a man who dwarfed the gods by his own grandeur, m) a man who was dwarfed by the grandeur of the gods, n) a man of ideal character, o) a man of indifferent or bad character, p) a frustrated or tragic hero, and so on. And last but not least there was the question how to counterbalance action and reflection, the very problem of the modern epic poem.

All these points represented fundamental issues which influenced and preconditioned, according to their predominance, the nature of the whole poem in that they necessitated a completely different management of character, a different relationship between hero and environment, a different handling of masses, a different moral or aesthetic temperament and so on. Some of them bore in them the danger of anachronism, some the danger of lack of objectiveness or active representation, some the danger of unsatisfactory and undesirable rivalry between man and God, some the danger of loss of heroic posture. There is no end to the list of problems the author had to cope with. Their mere existence, the various attempts to succeed in them against apparent odds and in the face of the predominant opinion that the hero ought to be a victorious warrior of the obscure past, is in itself a manifestation of the epic crisis; an indirect concession on the part of the authors that this opinion no longer satisfied their needs. And, to be sure, all those multifarious propositions listed above are such as the epic writers set themselves

in the course of the eighteenth century. We shall have to deal with them in chapters III and IV.

It is the multiplicity of attempts to portray traditional character in a new manner that in the absence of really great artistic achievements ought to form the centre of interest; it yields information quite different from that of most critics of the epic from Dennis to the present day, who, failing to perceive the real dilemma into which the genre had moved, simply criticized the works without reference to the circumstances that doomed them to failure⁸.

2. THE TYRANNY OF THE CAUSE

The epic of the eighteenth century was primarily an attempt to safeguard the continuation of the kind of heroic poetry which had been typified by the practice of Homer and Vergil and defined in the abstract by Aristotle's *Poetics*. It was consciously traditional in its constructive elements; it did not modify or alter that tradition with intent to destroy it but in order to preserve it by adapting it to the requirements of a more refined epoch. The controversial character of the development which began to depreciate the value of the traditional raw-material is therefore symptomatic rather than intentional. We must not expect the eighteenth-century epic to represent its pattern of humanity as obliquely and dialectically as Milton did and as the twentieth-century critics demand. It wanted to be heroic, it wanted to be active besides being reflective and it therefore related the doings of its heroes to an indisputable transcendental order; its morality was unequivocal and, therefore, not the object of discussion, and it was represented by the political and ethical life of a large community. The choric character of the epic was to be expressed in a concrete choric action involving multitudes of people under the leadership of a great hero who represented not himself but the moral, spiritual and political beliefs of the poet's own age.

With this conception the classicists were able to preserve the semblance of the classical set-up, but it also meant the rejection of Milton's solution who had decided in favour of representing universality through individuality. Especially from the hero's point of view, *Paradise Lost* was of absolutely no significance and might as well not have been written.

The difference in the approach cannot solely be attributed to the discrepancy between the poetical potentialities of Milton and those of the classicists. It is undoubtedly true that the religious and political upheavals of the late seventeenth century that led to the Revolution were singularly unpropitious for a poet to celebrate the confident serenity and greatness of a society united in the effort to build up a world of universal humanity. In this respect the mood of Milton's time certainly favoured the exploitation of a more

profoundly spiritual and less heroic theme, quite irrespective of the changes in the civilization of the time which in themselves endangered the position of the old hero. It was the twofold conviction that he lived at a time both unsuitable, and too late, for heroic poetry that must have prompted Milton to abandon Arthur in favour of the Fall of Man. But after the Revolution, things seemed to change rapidly for the better. If in reality the fact that it was too late to write a great heroic poem still held good, circumstances at least seemed to suggest that it might be suitable to write one. If one overlooked for a moment the complications of modern warfare with its less conspicuous individual heroism, historical events seemed to supply a striking sequence of momentous events providing a proper epic background: the establishment of a new kingdom after the Revolution by William—a theme reminiscent of Virgil's poem—the glorious rise of the nation to imperial greatness, to military and naval power during and after Marlborough's wars; all these formative processes in the political life of the nation, together with their spiritual and moral aspects seemed to favour the cultivation of a proud new epic spirit. Even if these modern events were felt to be too complicated for the simplicity of the heroic narrative, they nevertheless animated the writers to fall back on more ancient times and appreciate in them the happenings of their own age. In any case the action had to be of the highest importance. It had to be important enough to have a meaning for a whole people or even for the whole of mankind. It had to reflect the universal message of the epic; it had to be a great cause in itself, not merely a coincidence which happens to bring about the hero's apotheosis or downfall as, for instance, in the *Iliad* or in the *Song of Roland*.

The tyranny of the cause, of the great choric action, emerges as the most decisive factor in determining the specifically neoclassical epic hero, and also his failure because by virtue of its very importance it overcharges him with a load of responsibilities that prevents him from asserting his own dramatic personality.

Most eighteenth-century critics and writers were unaware of this danger, nor did they ever seriously try to define the poetical value of their new hero who made their own poems so essentially different from, and poorer than, the so called authentic epics. They all emphasize the priority of a cause which does not merely represent the backcloth to the hero's adventures and the source of his own personal troubles, but which is his constant lodestar, and the achievement of which sets aside all his own worries and conflicts. This specifically neoclassical attitude towards the cause, predominant ever since Bossu advocated it, attached more importance to the over-all design than to the subservient episode, which, for instance, in the *Odyssey* takes up so much more space and interest than the final purpose of the hero. Although the episodes were integral parts of the narrative, they were less significant

than the main design which according to Dryden had to be "one great action of some illustrious hero¹". Dennis speaks of an "Action, which is important²". Blackmore implies the superiority of the cause over individual episodes, saying that this cause must be represented by one certain "Illustrious Action³", an action which is to be "important both in respect of its Objects and its End. 'Tis the Action of some great Person, about some noble and weighty Affair⁴". The exaggerated respect paid to the nobility of the cause becomes evident, if we remember that the "weighty affair" that stirs up all the trouble in the *Iliad*, is less the siege of Troy as a sacred cause than the personal insult Achilles receives from Agamemnon. The strong emphasis Blackmore again and again places on the political and, more especially, on the national character of the cause raises it quite beyond the purpose which the Greek authorities thought fit to give it. As for Blackmore, so for Parnell, a great hero alone is not sufficient inducement for celebration; his adventures have to be conducive to the accomplishment of the more important cause. Epic personages are

... Persons, whom the writers use
 When'er a cause magnificently great,
 Would fix attention with peculiar weight⁵.

In the words of Trapp it is again "some glorious and fortunate Action⁶", for the sake of which the hero takes part in "a variety of great Events" or episodes, thus obliged to subordinate his own problems to those of the cause; "not the Person only but the Action should be illustrious⁷" the same critic repeats and thereby betrays a little uneasiness at the thought of Homer's shortcomings in this respect. For the same reason he prefers to rely on Dacier's interpretation of Aristotle rather than on Aristotle himself, a subtlety not uncommon in critics of the age. Brown is even more precise and restricted about the causes worthy of epic treatment. He quite calmly states that epic poetry deals with "the Establishment of an Empire" and all its "subordinate Episodes, religious, political and moral⁸" and thus modernizes without much scrutiny Virgil's practice. For Dr. Johnson, similarly, the episodes or incidents which form the narrative concern him less than the end in the service of which the hero labours, an end which is "naturally an event of great importance⁹". Warton, quite in keeping with this opinion, describes the hero as someone who "executes some grand design¹⁰". Ogilvie, too, looks upon epic writing not as primarily dealing with characters, but speaks of one greater "action which it is employed to celebrate¹¹". Ogden in his preface to *The Revolution*, once again advocates a hero who is commissioned with "the execution of a great design¹²" outside his own immediate interests. To round off this short survey of statements, which appear regularly distributed over the whole period, we refer to Ogilvie's

Britannia, in whose preface he may be said to give in a nutshell the practical implications of the cause for the portrayal of the epic heroes. He says of their characters that since they act in the service of such great events, "upon so great a theatre", they must be "suited to the ends which they are brought forward to accomplish¹³".

Character must be suited to the end, or, in other words, the cause determines character. Here we have the peculiar identification of the hero and the cause, contrary to most great epics of the world where the hero, in order to preserve his heroic personality, is not encumbered with the responsibility for the cause, but primarily concerned with himself and his existence, and this is exactly where the neoclassical craving for universality clashed with the essence of the epic tradition. By being raised from matters of personal concern into the spheres of everybody's concern, the new hero was divested of that dramatic power which a figure representing universality by means of individuality possesses, and he thereby not only abnegated the heroic tradition which he was supposed to carry on, but also diminished the reader's interest in his personality.

The resulting second-hand nature of the epic hero can be sensed in the remarks of most critics and is uncomfortably obvious in the majority of the poems of the century. The fact is even enhanced to further disadvantage by the implicit necessity to exalt the hero as the instigator and dominator of that selfsame cause of which he is, in reality, only a by-product; one cannot help feeling that in spite of the proclaimed greatness of the hero, the principle that he should spin the action out of his own mind and body is, if unintentionally, denied. All that is done, is done, not relative to the will of the hero, but relative to the cause; the events are not determined by him but, on the contrary, he himself is determined by the events.

The change which the epic of the eighteenth century underwent owing to the 'tyranny of the cause' is an exemplification of our hypothesis, according to which that epic does not rest on classical authority or rules, but is in itself a process of defining the requirements of its own time. Aristotle in his *Poetics* says nothing about a cause with which every action of the hero should directly be connected. He only speaks of the priority of the fable, or the plot. That this fable should be identical with any design of a political or abstract moral nature is in no way intimated; it simply means the rudimentary elements for building up a good story: "The fable, in our present sense of the term, is simply this, the combination of the incidents, or things done in the story¹⁴". In a good story these incidents follow one another logically and necessarily and thus form an "entire action", irrespective of its contents or meaning. Obviously, if we interpret these words as deductions from Homer's practice, the priority of the fable is not—as the classicists would have it—synonymous with the prime importance of this action as an end

in itself; it is simply a prerequisite for exhibiting "human happiness or misery¹⁵", or the fortunes, or the change in the "fortunes of man¹⁶". The story is thus not subservient to the gradual completion of a grand design, but is meant to show how it comes "that we are happy or the reverse¹⁷". In the last resort, then, it is man on whom everything is centered, not the contents of the fable. To say that Aristotle implied the priority of the plot over man, and of man over the plot, is only an apparent paradox. The priority of the plot is that of the raw material, the priority of man is that of the end-product. The poet first makes use of the one in order to exhibit the other. There is no doubt that in emphasizing and narrowly prescribing the historical or political ideal, neoclassicism moved away from Aristotelian precept in no undecisive manner and changed the epic hero in his most important potentialities. In many cases this divergence was not sharply realized or admitted; it often took place although the critic entertained the erroneous belief that he observed the very rules he twisted. Equally incorrectly he would frequently misinterpret Homer's poems by overemphasizing the importance of apparent 'causes', i. e. the defeat of Troy (which is never completed within the 24 books of the *Iliad*), or the destruction of Penelope's suitors in the *Odyssey*, whereby the latter cause, being only of a domestic kind, embarrassed the critics considerably and caused them to slighten the whole poem as quite inferior to the *Iliad*. We never get the impression that the eighteenth century detected, or owned up to, the fact that the cause in the *Iliad* was expressly dissociated from the hero's interest (Book I) and that it only provided the scenery for the rising and abating conflict between the wills of two stubborn, obstinate men; and that the cause in the *Odyssey* was not inspired by ulterior motives of any kind to which the hero's interests ranked second, but by reasons most emphatically personal. (Even in a non-classical epic such as the *Song of Roland* the cause is quite dwarfed by the personal tragedy of the hero; his character is the important concern, not the cause.) In all cases the cause represents only the narrative scaffolding, the pretext for the unity of action. It is a primitive stratagem to keep awake the interest in the continuity of incidents; as long as the known end is not in sight, we know that all is not overcome yet, and that 'something else' is still to be attended to, something which therefore heightens the significance of the episodes. It is an epic contrivance which particularly Defoe resorts to frequently as in the case of *Captain Singleton* (part one) where our interest in the fortunes of the party crossing the African desert is given no chance of flagging until we know they have either perished or come out safe at the other end. Similarly, the magic deserts *Robinson Crusoe* only when we know that the hero has safely been snatched from the confines of the island. The actual happenings, however, occur to a large extent quite outside the end which is to be brought about. Odysseus does not even get to grips with the

cause for over ten years; he is not only hindered whilst executing it, but for the most part hindered from even beginning to execute it—an attitude that is unthinkable in an eighteenth-century writer. Achilles, on the other hand, far from being hindered in executing the cause, hinders it himself! And even when he returns to it, it is only to complete the interrupted course of his own valour, not the cause. The poem ends with his anger come to rest, not with the fall of Troy.

In the *Aeneid*, indeed, Virgil meets the neoclassical conception halfway, in that the hero himself is responsible for the cause, the foundation of Rome. From him the classicists take over the idea of the establishment of an empire. The details of character and action which could be thrown in more copiously by Homer—because men were an end in themselves—become less significant in Virgil and the hero's character gravitates towards ideality. "Great issues are at stake", writes Bowra about this tendency, "that is partly why Virgil tells a story less well than Homer. His task prevents him from really enjoying a tale for its own sake¹⁸". Virgil, as a great writer, must have realized the danger that lay in an overemphasis on the cause and he was therefore prepared to devote half of his epic to forming his hero for the execution of the cause. Through his imperfections Virgil leaves us in doubt about the successful completion of it. Aeneas is not the incontestable master of his task from the outset. He grows to match up to it through a period of action that concerns him at least as much as the cause; Virgil has, in fact, the wisdom to jeopardize the cause because of problems of a dramatic character—a device which was again unthinkable for an eighteenth-century writer who considered it sacrilege in the face of the holiness of the cause to let personal weakness retard it or interfere with it. On the whole the classicists did not think of the story as a basis for what we would call psychological treatment of character, since in the light of the cause every man had at once to decide for or against it and was therefore not controversial in himself. The dependence of the character on the cause is expressed in Dryden's phrase, according to which the poet first fixes on some universal moral and only then "begins to think of the persons whom he is to employ in carrying on his design¹⁹".

The voices which in the eighteenth century ventured to proclaim the priority of character over the plot or the cause—these two mostly merge into one another—were few. Nevertheless they were there. Pemberton was one of the critics who were awake to the weaknesses inherent in the cause and opposes, if only in a vague manner, the subordination of character to it. That the study of character as an end in itself was a very extraordinary proposition to make in conjunction with epic poetry becomes apparent from the consciously revolutionary air of Pemberton's remarks. It should be the poet's intention, he says, not to celebrate the action but "to exhibit by

means of the Action the Characters and suitable conduct of the personages he employs in it²⁰". He goes on to say that some action would of course be necessary, but that our chief interest should not primarily be concerned with that action but with the "just representation of such sentiments and passions as the action will naturally excite in the personages engaged according to their respective characters²¹". He goes to great lengths to drive home his point: "however well contrived a fable may for once by its novelty amuse us agreeably; where the sentiments, the manners, and characters of men are displayed, we must receive a much more lasting pleasure²²". One aspect of the modern controversy is here touched upon, the relative merit of story or character for epic composition.

On the surface Pemberton's prepossession with character, as opposed to the fable, seems to be a blunt refutation of Aristotelian precept. He mentions this, in fact, and admits that "in assigning the primary intention of epic and dramatic poetry to be the representation of the different characters of men, and the effects of their several passions; I shall possibly be thought not to have paid a due regard to the decrees of Aristotle who expressly says '... that of all parts, of which it consists, the fable is the most important'²³". But although Pemberton declares that the time when classical authority was binding was past, we can in fact say that his revolutionary proposition is only an attack on Aristotle as modified by the eighteenth century, and what at first sight appears to be a heretical opinion, if compared with neoclassical precepts, is in reality more truly Aristotelian than that precept itself and confirms the impression we get in reading Homer's poems. (Another instance, incidentally, of the relativity or even meaninglessness of 'rules' in the neoclassical age.) But for all his endeavours which in themselves indicate the growth of dissatisfaction with the current ideas, Pemberton failed to materialize or even define the substance of his reflections. He created nothing new; he only shifted the stress from plot or cause to character within a conception predominantly neoclassical. The confession of his uncertainty lies in his observations on Glover's *Leonidas*, an epic about a great cause and its hero. In these observations Pemberton in no way criticizes the cause, but only asks us to remember that it was in the hero, and not in the story, that the poet was chiefly interested when he wrote the poem, and that it was by his character that we should judge the excellence of the poem. He exemplifies his novel ideas by applying them to a conventional pattern and thereby annihilates the potentialities of his own statements. In a similar fashion Hume proclaims independence of classical authority in order to exalt character over the cause; he says that "the story of a poem, whatever may be imagined, is the least essential part of it [the epic]" and that the force of the versification, the vivacity of the images, the justness of the description and particularly "the natural play of the passions²⁴" are the

chief circumstances which distinguish the great poet. Hume's impressions, however, are equally indistinct as to their possible materialization. Like Pemberton he bases his remarks on an epic of neoclassical origin, Wilkie's *Epigoniad*, and effects little more than a shift of stress inside tradition; he, too, stultifies the value of his proposition in that he believes it to be fulfilled in the *Epigoniad*. Neither of them finds fault with the cause as such or with the warrior. But by their dissatisfaction with the obvious neglect of character for its own sake, they add to the impression we receive of the inadequacy of the neoclassical set-up. It is only where the warrior is openly attacked, and with him the cause which he stood for, that we can see any promising signs of a positive epic development. Wherever that happened in any decisive way, we notice that it was in fact the novel which for some considerable time had done exactly what all the revolutionary tendencies inside epic poetry proper implied: it had given up the interest in an ulterior motive or cause that coerced the hero into a finished pattern of character and it placed the management of the hero's life in his own hands again. On the whole, however, the cause and its hero continued to be the central issues of the discussion and we have to study their mutual relationship in order to complete the picture of the latter.

3. THE IDENTITY OF CAUSE AND HERO - THE WARRIOR-STATESMAN

Once the cause was accepted by critic or poet as the framework of his epic, the choice of the leading character was naturally restricted to the gallery of famous men. Dryden expects the epic to relate a great action of "some illustrious hero¹". Blackmore specifies that an epic poem is a story "where Characters of the first Rank and Dignity, Illustrious for their Birth or high Employment are introduc'd²". Similarly Pemberton is of opinion that epic poetry and tragedy "relate chiefly to men in high station³"; they celebrate "the names of past heroes⁴". Dr. Johnson, naturally assuming the necessity for a great cause, tells us that these "great events can be hastened or retarded only by persons of elevated dignity⁵". For J. Warton the supreme demand on the hero is that he "be eminently distinguished⁶". Duff who, like Warton and many others, is said to represent the early Romantic trend in the eighteenth century, is wholly and uncompromisingly conventional when it comes to the question of the epic hero: "we will lay it down as an inviolable law in the conduct of an Epic Poem, that the characters of the principal persons must be ... illustrious⁷". Ogilvie, in his preface to *Britannia* desires the hero to be "some human character in a conspicuous and elevated point of view⁸".

We have deliberately chosen a few examples which, at first glance, may suggest that such definitions might well allow a more liberal interpretation; that the words 'illustrious' or 'elevated' might not necessarily refer to a political or warlike leader of men at all. But this is hardly the case; there is practically no evidence whatsoever that these remarks were also meant to include purely poetical eminence as distinct from eminence of social rank, or, in other words, that they could be applicable to the kind of eminence Robinson Crusoe achieves on his island, or the eminent isolation of Adam and Eve after the Fall. In the broader context of their writings it usually becomes quite clear that 'eminence' means high social standing and rank and, particularly for the epic, eminence linked with historical fame.

The influence of epic tradition in this respect is obvious. But the meaning or the function of the new hero's nobility diverges from that of the authentic warrior. For the traditional hero, nobility meant the prerogative to act as he pleased, it was his charter for freedom of action and behaviour, it raised him above the movements of the masses and made him conspicuous as an individual. At the same time, in order to preserve this independence and individuality, it was important for him not to be responsible for the supreme command of the undertaking in which he was engaged. All the heroes of successful epic poetry are vassals only to their commanders-in-chief; their rank is not prerequisite for the fulfilment of their tasks.

The fundamental difference of the neoclassical hero lies in the condition of his being commander-in-chief. He himself is the leader of the cause. His supremacy of rank is the prerequisite of his being the chosen hero. His nobility now means the end of his freedom of action, it means the subordination of his high qualities to the will of the cause. Thus the neoclassical hero, in charge of the universal mission of the epic, had become far more than a mere warrior. The qualities of a soldier were no longer sufficient recommendation to entitle him to the dignity of the epic hero. As a character symbolizing the beliefs and endeavours of a whole people or culture, he had also to concern himself with the government of a state in its religious, political and cultural aspects.

This is what the critics mean when they use the word 'king' or 'prince' or 'commander'. This new conception leads Dennis to say that in choosing the epic hero the poet "ought to observe two Things. First, to take those Names from History, to give the Action an Air of Truth. Secondly, to take the Names of Kings and Rulers of the Earth to make his Action important⁹". Based on the same conviction, Blackmore justifies his choice of Alfred as an epic hero by calling him "the Example of one of the greatest Monarchs, that ever ruled this or any foreign Nation¹⁰". In his "Laws of Poetry" Gildon, contrary to Aristotle's opinion and to Homer's practice, exalts epic poetry over tragedy, justifying his preference by saying that tragedy only

teaches those moral duties that are necessary to the happy conduct of private life, whereas "the lessons taught by the epic poem are political, and direct the conduct of states and Kingdoms¹¹". Quite in contrast to classical authority, Gildon thus defines the epic as dealing with things extra-personal and delegates to tragedy the object of analyzing the drama of individual character. Brown who, as we remember, called the establishment of an empire the objective of the epic hero, naturally admits of no other personality than the head of a nation. Similarly, Gibbon is of opinion that a prince who leads his men into a promised country to establish a new nation would be the best hero for an epic poem¹². Haylay particularly clamours for the portrayal of historical and national personalities and urges the 'mute inglorious Homers' of his age to write about them, complaining that "Her [England's] dearest Worthies yet remain unsung¹³". Ogden pays his tribute to the regal hero and his cause by writing an epic on the outstanding event of recent national history, the Glorious Revolution, in the Introduction to which he also emphasizes the importance of heroic example, patriotism and ideal statesmanship¹⁴. The subject of *The Revolution*—although by virtue of the modern character of its events a dangerous one, as we shall see later—provides the author with the grand theme of the birth of an ideal state which appealed to most writers as a tremendous asset. Ogilvie, imbued with the same spirit, says: "I feel peculiar pleasure in inscribing a Poem, of which the subject (the first Settlement of a great nation) is not unworthy of your regard¹⁵". His Brutus sets out to found Britain in such a direct and deliberate fashion as Aeneas never founded Rome.

That the hero should belong to national history was often declared necessary or desirable. Bossu's translator, W. J., criticizes the heroes of Cowley and Davenant (David and Gondibert) as proofs of their authors' ignorance about the importance of the national element in epic poetry. Even Addison implies a preference for national heroes when he commends the poet of the much-discussed "Chevy Chase Ballad" for having "found out an hero in his own country¹⁶". However, it would be wrong to say that the claim for the national hero was held with particular rigidity. Apart from the fact that it was often enough not mentioned at all, Glover's Leonidas, Wilkie's Diomedes or Southey's Joan all show opposite tendencies. The lesson which the epic was supposed to teach could equally well be taught by a Greek hero, or, for that matter, by any hero, provided he was the representative of a worthy cause.

In the practical application of the new conception of the hero, who in contrast to all authentic epic writing had become a man "laden with the cares of Empire¹⁷", it was inevitable that, in order to display these characteristics, a great deal of his energies had to be devoted to the purpose of planning and discussing moves of far-reaching political consequences, and

that therefore his heroic qualities could not always be displayed to full advantage. In epics dealing with modern history this fact makes itself felt as an even more aggravating circumstance; the hero himself is rarely, or never, seen in action, and individual heroism gives way in a very unsatisfactory manner to heroic episodes in which he has no part, or to an indiscriminate, collective sort of heroism of whole armies. Character is in danger of disappearing in the clash of masses.

The undue stress laid on the hero's responsibilities as a leader of a nation (to which are added those of a moral, religious and cultural symbol) represents the beginning of the *reductio ad absurdum* of heroic poetry proper. It is the beginning of the track that leads us to Abercrombie's confession, according to which we want a good story, although we shall have to abandon it. The classicists, however, were not yet conscious of this problem. Since action had always been defined as the very soul of epic poetry, and since heroic virtue had to be inspired by example, they postulated, without any qualms of conscience, both the hero's superb statesmanship, his spiritual greatness and his supreme efficiency as a warrior. As in the twentieth century, quantities that often prove incompatible, or at least extremely difficult to counterbalance, were demanded to be set forth with equal vigour. From the point of view of action it mattered little whether the abstract issues were moving in the direction of morals, politics, religion or of all three together; all of them presented enough aspects which afforded little or no scope for warlike action. In comparison with his duties as a builder-up of universal order and peace, his heroic feats are sporadic and no end in themselves, whereas the authentic hero's character had to be developed through them towards the final crisis or catastrophe which remained within the sphere of his own character and heroism. Battle in the *Iliad*, for instance, is essential for Hector because in the course of it his character is introduced and assessed as a match for that of Achilles in the final clash between the heroes. In the eighteenth-century epic it is not the warrior whose character is built up, but the missionary, the statesman, the moralist, and therefore battle loses its direct function. If in Homer we see the portrait of a man as the end-effect of the poem, and in neoclassical epic poetry the establishment of an empire, we can also say that in the former war is conducive to the end, in the latter war retards it.

A vast number of writers therefore ventured on precarious ground when, failing to recognize the far-reaching consequences that attended their modified version of the epic hero, they calmly made their statesmen great warriors as well. We notice that, characteristically enough, no mention is made, in the following examples, of the delicate problem whether a modern soldier could be represented at all; on the whole the rule concerning the obscure past for the choice of the hero was readily accepted to avoid the awkward problem.

In Blackmore's criticism the conflict between the refined hero of contemporary taste on the one hand, and of the fierce warrior on the other, is well discernible. He likes to see his leading character endowed with all the supreme faculties of a great ruler of the earth, as we can see from his praise of Alfred; he is a "Wise, or Pious Prince or great Commander¹⁸". Beside the considerable portion of suitable action that would have to be devoted to the display of these particular virtues, Blackmore also wants him to be an example of heroic bravery in the old style. He seems to realize the inconvenience of too much gentleness and piety and high thought and by way of contradicting and minimizing his previous statements about the hero's characteristics with regard to the cause, he reverts to the primary capacity of the warlike actor, declaring "but let his Character be what it will in other respects (For there is no Necessity the Hero should be a good or a Wise Person) 'tis always necessary he should have courage, which single Quality is sufficient to make the Hero¹⁹". The plain truth is that Blackmore did not really mean what he said. To imagine a mere warrior at the head of an expeditionary force, whose task it is to establish an empire, was undoubtedly quite far from his mind. Like some of the modern critics he simply avoids confusion by dealing separately with irreconcilable quantities. Dryden stresses the heroic example as a means of forming the reader's mind and character; Dennis, too, expects the hero to be a warrior of "extraordinary Valour" and "Native Greatness²⁰". With Parnell again it is "The Toil of Heroes on the dusty plains²¹" which is the subject of an epic poem. Parnell in particular confuses the neoclassical tendencies with an otherwise almost slavish imitation of Homer without being aware of the difference between Homer's individuals and the neoclassical cause-heroes. He still thinks in terms of poets who "arm their hero for the field", or with "prophetic story paint the shield", and who "fix the crest" and "make the feathers wave²²". Warlike achievements are also the touchstone for Philips's criticism of his collected Ballads which he is prepared to compare with Homer because they are so brimful of "courage", "Dignity", or "heroick bravery²³". Philips overlooks irregularities because there is enough heroic tradition to excuse them. He even tries to prove that they are more heroic than the Ancients themselves and in this joins hands with Addison, who says about the death of Earl Douglas in the "Chevy Chase Ballad" that "Turnus did not die in so heroic a manner²⁴". Even Lord Home, who apparently displays a very liberal attitude, identifies 'epic' with 'heroic' and adds little to the general picture when he says that "a work where heroic actions are related in an elevated style, will, without further requisite, be deemed an epic poem²⁵". His disapproval of prescribed authority is not in itself a sign of essential deviation from the conventional hero. Clara Reeve, who was one of those scholars who ventured to speak of the novel as an epic in prose, cannot

imagine the heroes of epic poetry to be anything else than "heroes", or "men of extraordinary courage and abilities²⁶"; the warrior is implicitly there. Ogden's *The Revolution* and Ogilvie's *Britannia* are in themselves evidence of a conception that advocates war and warriors as the favourite themes of epic poetry. Blair in his "Lectures" joins the vast group of critics who slighten the *Odyssey* because "it descends indeed from the dignity of the Gods, and Heroes, and warlike achievements²⁷".

If we investigate again how far this eighteenth-century rule about the warrior-statesman coincides with Aristotle's decrees, we soon understand that just as he says nothing about the cause, he says nothing about the necessity for either a 'ruler of the earth' or a warrior; the trinity of cause, king and commander in a historical setting is specifically neoclassical. Aristotle never uses the word 'king', or 'prince', or 'soldier'; he refers to the epic character as 'man', 'human being', or 'personage'. Even if his observations rest on a definite character where the term soldier or king could appropriately be used, he prefers calling the hero 'a man'²⁸: "A certain man has been abroad many years ..." etc.²⁹ is how he describes the fable of the *Odyssey*. Epic poetry indeed, like tragic poetry, was supposed to deal with serious problems and therefore had to assume a certain nobility. That nobility of rank and nobility of subject should coincide in the chief actors is a natural circumstance of the time; just as natural as that in modern tragedy the hero need *not* be a nobleman. However, the nobility which Aristotle means, as becomes clear from the context, is not primarily nobility of rank. He does not use the term of nobleman as opposed to commoner (one of the soundest pieces of advice given to Hector is given by a commoner), but speaks of 'noble persons' and 'ignoble persons', 'noble actions' and 'ignoble actions'. The distinction, no doubt, is an ethical one and a hierarchical one only by force of circumstances. Furthermore the hero, according to Aristotle, did not necessarily have to be one of historical eminence. Quite on the contrary, he speaks of historical associations as only one possible aspect of the hero and calls it absurd to rely completely on known facts "as even the known stories are only known to few³⁰". To make his point quite clear he mentions Agathon's *Antheus* "in which both incidents and names are of the poet's invention; and it is no less delightful on that account³¹". Although Aristotle says this with regard to tragedy, he does not contradict it under the heading of epic poetry, and we must therefore expect it to be valid for both. By and large we can say that just where eighteenth-century criticism seemed to speak for a most rigid adherence to classical authority, it invented something essentially different from it. It was the natural desire to interpret authority in a way that appealed to the conception of a new age. This adaptation, however, did not solve the question of the leading character, because the shortcomings of the

unheroic hero could not be mended by forcing upon him the warlike ideal of a bygone epoch, an ideal which had once been sufficient to celebrate the purpose and glory of man. Although the warrior is still the accepted hero, his position is endangered by the new conceptions of the very critics who advocate him most strongly.

4. THE WARRIOR ENDANGERED

In view of the extremely strong position which the modified Homeric warrior commanded in eighteenth-century criticism, we understand more clearly why Milton's new type of hero exercised such negligible influence on the development of epic poetry in that epoch. Far from appreciating the momentous difference in the approach to epic character in *Paradise Lost* the classicists on the contrary went to great pains in ignoring in it what to them seemed unhomeric and unaristotelian, and in over-emphasizing what could be made to conform to popular precept. In the discussion of epic poetry, however, *Paradise Lost* as often as not fell altogether outside critical interest, as indeed all the definitions and properties hitherto described make us expect. Thus the preconceived neoclassical idea of the warrior-statesman dwarfed the gigantic potentialities of Milton's new type, and the really revolutionary moment in the history of the epic passed by unheeded. The numerous weaknesses inherent in the warrior were acknowledged only in the vaguest manner and in most cases became evident merely by way of contradictions in the theories of one and the same author. The very existence of such contradictions is, however, an indication of the incipient crisis. These contradictions occurred, as we have seen, already in the late seventeenth century. If Blackmore asks for a symbolization of political, moral, religious and philosophical ideas, and, having dealt with this aspect of the matter, remembers the importance of action and declares heroic courage the only important requirement for the hero, he shows himself to be entangled in very much the same dilemma in which the twentieth-century critics are who fail to reconcile ulterior motives and straightforward narrative. Blackmore's statement about heroism as a self-sufficient epic criterion is in fact only one within a vicious circle that inevitably leads him back to the belief that the ulterior motive might, after all, be the more urgent desideratum. Blackmore wrote two big epics about warriors and one about wars, only to realize that heroic action contributed little to the various abstract issues he was eager to put forward; perhaps he was even vaguely aware of the episodic character of battle in modern epic, when he tried to prepare the ground for a poem in which he intended to do away with war as the chief theme: "I should be glad to know what Gentlemen mean when they affirm that

nothing is to be admitted into the Poem we are discoursing of [the epic], but Action. Sure they cannot think that we are to be entertained there only with Musters, Camps, Battles, and Sieges¹". He gladly and, for that matter, correctly, too, supports his opinion with Homer's and Virgil's poems. "If this were a true maxim, it would exclude the greatest Part of Homer's Ulysses and of Virgil's Aenead²". The remarkable point is that Blackmore not only renounced war as a subject but 'action' in the widest sense of the word. He felt that there must be more room for the discussion of his important abstract problems; in other words: the analytical nature of modern epic writing here manifested itself for the first time after Milton. Descriptions and explanations impinge on the rights of the action. Abercrombie's verdict that we cannot go on forever with courage as the sole purpose of epic art, and that the modern consequence of this is that we may have to dispense with the story altogether is here shown in its nascence. Blackmore, of course, was still pseudoaristotelian enough to demand a story, but he was of opinion that only the predominant part of the poem need be active. (Even so the story of *Alfred* is extremely loose and unimportant.) With the air of indignation that often accompanies major divergence from tradition in the eighteenth century, Blackmore remonstrates thus: "To say dogmatically and with a masterly Air, that the Nature of an Epick Poem excludes all Discourses, is a bold and arbitrary Position, while no proof or the least Colour of Reason is produced to support it³. An Epick Poem may for the greatest and most prevailing Part be denominated active, which is all that its Nature or Essence can demand, and yet proper Dialogues and Discourses may notwithstanding sometimes intervene, that carry on the main Design⁴." Pure volition no longer dominates the action. What in *Paradise Lost* became so important, namely the verbal communication amongst the actors, exchanging words that were charged with meaning rather than being mere transmissions of orders, or exhortations, here reappears in a poetically immature form. "Speeches, Invocations, Prayers, Praises, Debates, Odes⁵, ... moral and political Discourses and Soliloquies, as well as Devotions and Thanksgivings⁶" form an essential part of the new epic poem, and in making them the concern of the hero, Blackmore obviously took away from the warrior his very 'raison d'être'. Although his ideas are expressive of the modern crisis, they were not consciously so. They were the result of several abortive poems dependent on, but not in the spirit of, the old heroic manner, but they did not lead him to any far-reaching insight into the universal causes of his own failure. Nowhere did he relate his findings to broader historical necessities and developments, and, above all, he was far from recognizing the ever-growing irrelevance of the warrior-statesman in his new, unwarlike surroundings. He had no substitute to offer for the loss of narrative substance, nor did he turn to character as a possible centre of interest; he merely exchanged the

story for purely abstract moral and political deliberations, uniting them all in the person of the warrior-hero. With his conception Blackmore signals the fate of modern epic poetry, the disintegration of the unity of action, thought and hero.

Some indication of the growing inadequacy of the warrior is also contained in Pemberton's observations on *Leonidas*, in which, as we remember, he places the action second to the study of character. This study is supposed to lay open "the inmost recesses of the soul" and to motivate its reactions. He does not believe that battle is sufficient to exhaust the character of modern man and he bestows special praise on scenes like the farewell of Leonidas to his wife or the love and mourning of Ariana for the fallen philosopher Teribazus, that is, on scenes which—although derived from, and inspired by, Homer—are episodes in which the importance of the hero's profession counts for little. Later critics time and again refer to these unwarlike and emotional aspects in *Leonidas* or in epic poetry in general, whilst little thought is given to the question, whether the warrior was really the only desirable personality to represent them. Blair, for instance, entertains no doubts about the necessity for heroic achievement. Kings and great adventurers are his heroes, yet at the same time he talks of the poetical beauty of human anguish in scenes where war plays no part at all and affirms that "the more an epic Poem abounds with situations which awaken the feelings of humanity, the more interesting it is; and these form, always the favourite passages of the work". For similar reasons Wilkie, in his preface to the *Epigoniad*, comes to the conclusion that although he is writing a poem about a siege and the sacking of a town, valour and courage are only sporadic and by no means permanent virtues, and that there should be room for many other human passions, meant to interpret human character. With Wilkie, the warrior lost considerably in meaning and prestige; war might have been a convenient narrative means for the portrayal of character, but it ceased to be of such an integral significance as in authentic epic poetry. We need only remember that Achilles's tragedy arises from the very fact that he, left to choose between a long life in peace or a short one in glory, chooses war in order to fulfil himself; he is a warrior because as such he can best reach the ultimate goal of a man's life which then happened to be "famam extendere factis" and not to achieve moral excellence or philosophical wisdom.

Quite often the martial tradition was criticized not so much because it was felt to be inadequate as a representation of the modern epic purpose, but simply because it was considered exhausted by, and too inevitably reminiscent of, Homer or Virgil and therefore never escaped the disadvantage of being imitative. Trapp in his lectures takes this view and expresses his dissatisfaction with the popular conception: "Nor think it essential to an Heroic Poem to describe the Anger of some great General, the Return of a

King into his own Country, a Colony transplanted from one Region to another ... or a Hero furbish'd with celestial Armour; But rather avoid these, and many other Subjects, which are treated of by Homer and Virgil; and for that very Reason, because they are so. Whoever attempts an Heroic Poem, must form a new plan, and guard against the Stroke of Horace's Satire: 'O imitatores, servum pecus'⁹'. Trapp only suggests the necessity for some 'new plan' without giving any example of an event or cause which he would consider important enough, yet completely different from the spirit of the old models. In this case the shortcomings which attended the conventional set-up engendered negative criticism, but the singular nature of the crisis made it impossible to be too precise about the new course.

The anachronistic quality of the warrior appears to be particularly obvious to the reviewer of Kedington who, as we remember, advocated the priority of character over the cause. He was one of the few critics who appreciated the difficulties of presenting with some accuracy and conviction a social background of the obscure past. More than that, he realized that any such attempt would fail to arouse the interest which a contemporary setting would be more likely to create. He holds that, in order to give the appearance of truth to a historical set-up, the poet would have to describe the manners and ideas of that time rather than those of his own. However near he could get to the true spirit of that age, he would only achieve a certain archaeological quaintness in the "describing of manners which had been long antiquated"¹⁰. Therefore, the Reviewer asks for a thorough rejuvenation of the epic. He argues that we no longer consider the laws of Greek tragedy as binding and that he could see no reason why we should not in a like manner succeed in "improving the epic"¹¹. He then goes on to propose that someone should write an epic poem about modern times. As far as we can make out from the mass of evidence before us, the Reviewer was the first critic to break through the barrier of the 'obscure past'—which had hitherto been regarded as one of the inviolable laws of epic poetry—into our own cultural sphere. For the classicists this law had been, and still was, of particular significance, because an epic hero could more safely be idealized if there was not a load of contradictory historical evidence to the fact that he was perhaps a rather ordinary man who was bald and who indulged in a number of objectionable propensities. If the Reviewer therefore declared modern times as permissible epic hunting grounds, he imperilled the security of the conventional neoclassical type to no inconsiderable degree. On the one hand, the author of his modern epic would find himself up against the sober evidence of contemporary knowledge in the face of which he might not depict successfully an illustrious hero in the neoclassical fashion. On the other hand, this meant perhaps that he would have to choose an unknown hero whose life could be invented and shaped

to suit the purposes of the poet. In the first case a warrior could hardly be the figure chosen, even if war was to play a decisive role, because in a world of gunpowder and uniforms he would be far too inconspicuous as a hero of the old school, to say nothing of the fact that, as a general, he would probably not take an active part in the battle. The result would at best be a poetic account of wars at the expense of individual bravery. Blackmore's *Eliza*, Ogden's *The Revolution*, Gordon's *Prussiad* and Cockings's *War* all confirm this point with singular uniformity. In the second case, that of an unknown character, the illustrious hero was ruled out, since the poet could not expect to coax the reader into believing that an unknown man had played the decisive part in the history of modern war. The Reviewer seems indeed to have considered this matter carefully. Like Trapp he favours a 'new plan' in which war is discarded as an important theme. We ought to dissociate ourselves from Homer, he argues, if we want better epic poems. As long as we cling to the habit of describing how "armour rings against armour"¹² instead of interpreting human character, we shall forever produce poems of exactly the same mould. He knows that for Homer "excellence in combat constituted almost all the dignity of an hero; without battles therefore he could not exalt his characters"¹³. The undesirability of that kind of epic poetry, according to the Reviewer, arises from the fact that heroic actions no longer represent the essential basis on which to build up and value character: "skill in war, or courage, make but a virtue of a very subordinate nature among us"¹⁴. It is interesting to notice that Abercrombie's seemingly modern idea that we 'cannot go on forever with courage as the solitary valuation of life' is nearly a hundred years old! In both critics it is the same conclusion drawn from the same awareness of epic atrophy. The Reviewer openly declares that "fighting heroes therefore would argue but a narrow conception in the poet"¹⁵. Epic poetry—and here epic poetry assumes a meaning different from heroic poetry—ought, in his opinion, to interpret life as the reader knows it, not as it used to be; he ought "to strike out after nature, which is ever appearing in circumstances of variety"¹⁶. Once more we can see that an author who, from the neoclassical point of view, is anti-formalist, is in reality more truly classical than those who pretend to be so. Like Dryden, the Reviewer only asks the poet to imitate 'like Homer', not to imitate Homer himself or in the style of Homer. If Homer was a realist and painter of his own cultural peculiarities, the modern epic poet should do likewise and "boldly follow nature in the dress she wears at present: if, in an age like this, when all the social duties are perfectly understood, an hero was drawn in every circumstance of real dignity, not that acquired by fighting battles, or commanding armies, but such as results from the just conduct of his passions; who was great, not from adventitious dignity or titles, but a finely regulated understanding: such an hero would fill the

scene of an epic poem with more dignity, and interest us more than all the swift-footed Achilles's, or pious Eneas's of antiquity¹⁷". It is certainly true to say that this critic was aware of the real reason for the stagnation in the development of the epic. We can also say that to a certain degree the essence of his remarks points in the direction of *Paradise Lost* where Milton, too, chose as his human actors characters that are important, not because of their heroic virtues or adventitious titles, but because of their deeply human problems. But although the Reviewer's position was a remarkably progressive one, it bears the same characteristics that are found in modern theory: it only attacks but does not account for the potential difficulties of the new plan to any sufficient degree. Its virtue lies in the fact that it recognizes the end of the warrior and of heroic poetry proper, but it says little about the ensuing incompatibility of inconspicuous character and grand verse, or of the kind of action that is to fill up the gap caused by the disappearance of war. If any positive deduction can be made from his remarks it is this, that the novel would suggest itself as the appropriate art-form to cope with the problems he raised. Compared with most other critics of the eighteenth century, however, the anonymous reviewer anticipated the modern attitude with unparalleled thoroughness. In order to see how clear-sighted his views were, we need only consult critics such as Newbery who also disapproved of a slavish imitation of ancient authority, but who believed he could overcome the difficulties by declaring a modern soldier as permissible. Although Newbery felt the incongruity of heroic and modern times, he paid little attention to the host of problems which his modern soldier conjured up and to the solution of which his whole set of rules contributed little or nothing.

Another implication of the warrior in modern epic poetry is contained in a remark by Brown, who justly praises Homer's poems as representations of then valid cultural, political and religious activities and institutions, whereby war constituted an essential and noble feature, "If the People be fierce and warlike Strength, Courage, Agility, and Cunning, are the ruling Virtues¹⁸". As soon as the conditions introduced by 'if' change—and Brown also implies that they do—the validity and relevance of the warrior change accordingly. More explicit again is the translator of the *Lusiad*, Mickle, although we must remember that he may say much only in justification of the poem he has set out to translate. "Where the seige of a town and battles are the subject of an Epic, there will of necessity, in the characters and circumstances, be a resemblance to Homer; and such poem must therefore want originality¹⁹". Obviously Mickle's argument is that of exhausted heroism rather than that of the hero's anachronistic value. "So fully is the strife of war exhausted by Homer, that Virgil and Tasso could add to it but little novelty; no wonder, therefore, that so many Epics on battles and sieges have been suffered to sink into utter neglect²⁰". "What reader but must be

tired with the deaths of a thousand heroes, who are never mentioned before nor afterwards in the poem. Yet in every battle we are wearied out with such Gazette returns of the slain and wounded²¹." The obvious disadvantage for the modern poet of traditional heroic poetry is here indicated; whilst Homer could pack all kinds of pleasant and interesting details into the short accounts of every fallen hero and thus make the poem a document of people's habits and of tribal peculiarities, the modern poet could only repeat or invent what he did not personally know and therefore had little to give to the reader in the way of social history. In Camoens, Mickle believes he has found an answer to the question of the modern hero. He bestows much praise on his choice of subject: "the original turn and force of his mind led him from the beaten tract of Helen's and Lavinia's, Achilles's and Hector's, sieges and slaughters, where the hero hews down and drives to flight whole armies with his own sword²²". With a triumphant air Mickle points out that if war must needs be preserved as part of the modern epic, originality could be shown even here and the conventional weapons of the epic be replaced by rifles. "It has been said, that the buckler, the bow, and the spear, must continue the arms of poetry" (a necessary concession to achieve the desired plasticity of action), "yet, however unsuccessful others may have been, Camoens has proved that fire-arms may be introduced with the greatest dignity and finest effect in the Epic Poem²³". It is quite significant, however, that the poetic management of fire-arms by Camoens rests on conditions that differ essentially from those that made combat a functional part of the story of the hero in heroic poetry proper. In the first place the employment of rifles by Camoens is perhaps even more episodical in its function than battle in eighteenth-century epic poetry; but it is much more permissible in the *Lusiad* for the very reason that it is not the main issue of the poem and immaterial to the portrayal of character. It is much rather used as a dramatic device in the art of story-telling; it occurs, for instance, in relation to people who have never before in their lives seen these weapons, which means that their use provides the poet with highly entertaining or even grotesque situations such as the consternation and reaction of the enemy on the discharge of a salvo. Such miniature wars occur again in Defoe's *Captain Singleton*; but they are limited in their importance and cannot be made the central issue of the story. On the other hand, modern warfare could not serve the same purpose, as soon as it was represented on a large scale.

The awareness of the rift between the superior narrative possibilities of heroic tradition and its growing irrelevance is very marked in Gibbon's criticism of the sixth book of the *Aeneid*. It may be convenient to mention him here, because like Camoens and Mickle, he welcomes a great explorer as a possible epic hero. His sympathy is clearly on the side of the warrior-statesman; necessity prompts him to admit that the greatness of the hero

"is not indeed always dependent on the rank or names of the Personages. Columbus, exploring a new world with three sloops and ninety sailors, is a Hero worthy of the Epic Muse²⁴". In the case both of Gama and Columbus we have, of course, still representatives of national causes; for Gibbon, the explorer is an acceptable hero, not because he is more interesting than the warrior, but because he is the best possible substitute for traditional greatness and valour once the warrior had—with much regret—to be discarded. It is unlikely that Gibbon's Columbus would have contributed decisively towards a new approach to epic character. It would have been interesting to see how Gibbon would have filled the transatlantic crossing with action. A few storms, a mutiny, fever, dreams, prayers and moral dialogues?!

Ogilvie's remarks represent the equivalent of Dixon's criticism in the twentieth century. Like Dixon, Ogilvie admits that the heroic ages are past but, at the same time, he points out that it would be better to fall back on the heroes of those ages for the sake of the narrative. Quite correctly he rejects modern warfare as too indiscriminate and sees as a result poems about wars rather than warriors, and the impingement of history on poetry. He realizes that for Homer it was possible, without being improbable, to describe a warrior whose wrath and actual strength were sufficient cause to stir up the indignation, fear or admiration of whole armies and that therefore there was enough personal interest to make character rather than the war of Troy the center of interest. As soon as Ogilvie admits the irrelevance of such environment and character in our own time, yet falls back on it for technical reasons, he also admits the archaeological import of his epic that neglects modern man and the spirit of modern social environment. He must be prepared to accept with his story the consequences of describing "the manners of the times in which we suppose that it was carried on. To an age distinguished by Heroes, and by the deeds of heroism, he [the poet] cannot do justice without describing simple manners, arduous enterprises, and efforts of valour, which may be rendered more marvellous than those of late ages; as we have reason to believe, that men, before they were emasculated in great cities by the enfeebling refinements of luxury, possessed powers of body, as well as an energy of mind, by which they undertook and accomplished the most perilous achievements²⁵". Thus Ogilvie expressly puts the epic and its hero into a category of poetry which has nothing to do with modern experience and thereby makes the warrior a figure whose miraculous or marvellous aspects become more important than his truly human traits.

The conclusion that we can draw from a study of criticism concerning the warrior-hero in epic poetry is, that his position was endangered in spite of the innumerable votes in his favour. This situation is enhanced in its peculiarity by the fact that even where he does appear as the accepted embo-

diment of the epic purpose, his character is no longer primarily that of the extrovert fighter, but that of a nobleman concerned with morals, philosophy and politics; the warrior-statesman is at once a symptom and a result of the modern epic crisis. The endeavour to preserve the warrior by combining his heroic faculties with the achievements of modern refinement and wisdom has never been given up completely, although it was doomed to be patchwork at best. The revolutionary, i. e. the anti-heroic school of thought, (if such a school can be said to have existed at all), was undoubtedly the loser in the battle of wits. The examples set by Homer and Virgil—with the exception perhaps of Tasso no other epic poet is ever mentioned seriously—still dominated the conception of epic poetry throughout the eighteenth century; but the differentiation between epic and heroic did nevertheless take place. Behind its mask of seemingly quiet formalism, the eighteenth century, whether consciously or unwittingly, conceded the disintegration of the “heroic poem”.

5. THE MORAL QUALITIES OF THE HERO – THE SUM TOTAL OF ALL VIRTUES

The tyranny of the cause shapes the character not only as regards his rank and standing in society, politics or history, but also as regards his moral qualities. Since, contrary to epic tradition, it is not the drama of the hero's own life that is fought out in neoclassical epic poetry, but the cause, all acts and deeds of the hero only gain their full meaning and quality if related to this cause. In other words: the hero is not only a participant in the transactions of the story, but a symbol of the cause itself; he represents it, he stands for it, he is the cause personified. If in theory he could still be wilfully original and personal, practice nevertheless shows that his enormous task of representing the cause at once extended his personality far beyond any kind of detailed individuality. Unlike Virgil, the eighteenth-century poet was less prepared to sacrifice the cause to some weakness in the hero's character and bearing, because any such defects would have been felt to be injuries to the cause as well. A hero who was supposed to mould with his personality the entire course of events on which depended the welfare and fate of whole nations, had to be derived from characteristics of the same solemn nature as that of the cause itself; a neoclassical hero whose personality was marked by Odyssean slyness and all its highly humorous consequences was plainly unthinkable. Consequently, the hero could not be allowed to show any signs of excentricity that might have made his character unique and interesting, not even if the result was the type of hero whom Pope ridicules in his “Receipt to Make an Epic Poem”. The hero, identifiable with the seriousness of the cause, had to be a character that could be worshipped

and praised together with the end he toiled for. The neoclassical temperament conceived of the epic as a panegyric on the cause personified. The hero, therefore—unlike Achilles, Odysseus, Aeneas, Roland, Satan, Adam—was primarily an undramatic figure; he was the universal concern impersonated, the static principle. He did not create any problems—he represented their ideal solution. A huge gap is, thereby opened at once between hero and reader. The relationship between these two is that of the imperfect receiving a moral lesson from the perfect. There are virtually hundreds of statements to the fact that epic poetry has “to form the mind to heroic virtue¹”, “to give Men right and just Conceptions of Religion and Virtue²”, “to cultivate the mind with instructions of virtue³”, or that the chief design of epic poetry is to “instruct⁴” or to “Instruct and Reform⁵”. The pattern set by these early writers is more or less uniformly followed by most critics throughout the century. It is not our task to expatiate on this well-known subject in general; we mention the extreme emphasis on morality only to say that it nowhere contributes so much towards the impoverishment of a genre as it does in epic poetry. This is because it imposed far too many restrictions on the dramatic possibilities of the hero’s character to make him a life-like personality. Whereas in the novel the method of teaching morals by the hero’s mistakes was with much success resorted to by all great writers (particularly by Defoe, Fielding and Smollett), the epic poets, blinded by the austerity of the cause, only believed in inculcating the same morals by virtue of exhibiting exemplary character; exemplary not only in a human, but rather in a superhuman degree. In this way only could the poet excite the ruling sentiment that was commensurate with the lofty nature of the cause, the feeling of the highest admiration: admiration is a keyword of epic terminology in the eighteenth century. Its unabating recurrence proves the fact that the neoclassical approach to epic poetry never changed materially; wherever it appears as the foremost sentiment in the judging of the species, we can be sure to find a fairly unadulterated neoclassical conception. According to Dryden the predominant virtue of the hero—the virtue that is to recur in the poem as a sort of leit-motiv—must be one which “raises first our admiration⁶”. Blackmore holds that “Admiration is the Formal Object of an Epick Poem⁷”. Pope, otherwise the most truly classical mind engaged in the discussion, endorses the same idea. Drawing a comparison between tragedy and epic poetry he names terror and pity as the proper passions of the former whereas, on the other hand, “the Passion that seems most peculiar to Epic Poetry, is Admiration⁸”. Brown, in his essay on Shaftesbury, again calls “admiration⁹” the ruling sentiment in epic poetry, since the greatness of the cause necessitates the employment of actors whom we could look up to with awe. Wilkie similarly asserts that epic poetry “aims at exciting admiration¹⁰”. Warton advocates this precept in the same strain,

saying that "one may define epic poetry to be, a fable related in verse to inspire an admiration and love of virtue¹¹", the implication being, of course, that the hero himself was the person to possess all the perfections necessary for this inspiration. Blair once more declares that epic poetry is "to extend our ideas of human perfection; or in other words, to excite admiration¹²". Ogilvie, supporting his ideas with a poem that leaves no doubt about the excellence of the hero's qualities, requires the epic "to excite the highest degree of admiration¹³" and the hero to be some human character of such qualities "as to be an object of admiration¹⁴". There are scores of identical criticisms at any stage of the discussion in the eighteenth century and there is no indication that this conception was completely on the wane at the end of it. Unfortunately most classicists believed they inspired this admiration to the extent by which they succeeded in making the hero's character perfect. As in many other contexts we may here come across statements which—from our own point of view—would seem to allow a less rigid interpretation in that the hero's moral excellence may be achieved merely by a predominance of good qualities over bad. Philips, for instance, simply speaks of the element of "dignity¹⁵" in the hero's character. Pemberton points out that poetry has at all times been employed "to sing the exploits of great and worthy men¹⁶", that the characters of an epic poem in particular should be "worthy to be expatiated on" and that "the more worthy any of them shall be of the attention of the public, the greater will be the excellence of his [the poet's] work¹⁷". Warton conceives of the epic hero as a character "displaying the beauty and excellence of exalted virtue¹⁸". Duff requires him to be not only illustrious but also "virtuous¹⁹", whereby this epithet, in his opinion, should also be shared by all the main actors of the hero's retinue. Gibbon wants the epic to display "great virtues²⁰". Blair favours high moral sentiments as appropriate constituents of the hero's character, since he is supposed to arouse admiration, a feeling that can be inspired only by "virtuous characters²¹".

But even in these seemingly moderate characterizations we sense the neoclassical love of ideality from which they are in fact derived and which embraces virtuous character the more enthusiastically, the more it borders on perfection. But we must be careful not to equate the kind of ideality that characterizes the epic hero with what we usually understand by 'ideal characters' in eighteenth-century literature. The greater number of ideal personages, particularly those of the novels, were still meant to be probable, if exalted instances of human virtue. Heroines like Pamela or Amelia are still susceptible to petty human miseries and intrigues; their perfection is one that is constantly being assailed and endangered by a multitude of familiar wiles and worries. Ordinary life forms the link between exalted virtue and probable perfection. The epic hero, however, commissioned with

the execution of the cause only on condition of his moral inviolability, has no points of contact with that kind of life. He is a character that has even shed what, from the reader's point of view, may be called the pleasant agony of virtue in distress. Thus he is consciously and deliberately lifted above the probable to the same extent as his bodily strength and beauty rise into the sphere of the improbable and the marvellous. In the neoclassical conception of the epic marvellous appearance, marvellous action and marvellous virtue go hand in hand.

The classicists themselves expressly and consciously encouraged the epic poet to depict, for the sake of admiration, beings outside the sphere of human experience both with regard to their physical and moral characteristics. Dennis, for instance, praises the hero as a man of such uncommon greatness that in addition to his "admirable valour and native greatness" he knows, if necessary, "the order of nature inverted on his behalf"²². Wilkie who, on the one hand, demands a faithful copy of human nature, is too strongly imbued with the neoclassical spirit to escape contradiction: the "high characters" whom the poet is obliged to engage in his action "reject ordinary forms; and therefore must, upon every occasion break thro' all the common modes both of speech and behaviour"²³. "It plainly appears", says Wilkie, "that admiration claims for its objects something superior to mere humanity"²⁴. He also favours the rule according to which the hero had to be one of the obscure past, since all kinds of perfections could thus be grafted on him without violating any historical records. True character as related by impartial historiography was, in Wilkie's opinion, not good enough for an epic hero since "history gives to all things their just and natural dimensions"²⁵. Undoubtedly it is not the idea of realistic character heightened by the element of the marvellous that is uppermost in the poet's mind, but the idea of character fundamentally marvellous and, from the outset, above the sphere of reality. In order to fulfil the epic purpose the poet, according to Wilkie, has to magnify character itself, not only its manifestation in action; he has to accomodate it "rather to our notions of heroic greatness, than to the real state of human nature"²⁶. It is the over-sized appearance that is essential—that which is extraordinary. We are supposed to be struck by the hero's elementary superiority in converting high designs into action and achievement. The marvellous in the character of the hero becomes an end in itself. The same danger also lies in Warton's words when he says that our delight is chiefly founded on the fact that the kind of life described in the epic poem is above our own experience. "The greater the action the more will it please and engage all men, as it is the natural foible and propensity of human nature to be delighted with every thing that is above common life"²⁷. "The opinion that epic characters are unmistakably outside experience recurs in Duff's observations on "Original Genius",

where epic characters are divided into three categories. The first category contains "real human characters, such as are found in every country and age²⁸". These 'real' characters, however, have no place amongst the leading personages of an epic poem. Epic heroes belong to the second category of characters which "are likewise human, but of the most dignified kind; raised far above the level of common life²⁹", or "raised far above the ordinary standard of human excellence³⁰". There is little conviction in Duff's concession that it might be a good thing if the hero were not altogether "above the sphere of humanity"; he is nevertheless the sum total of all virtues, a man who does not exist today, a man who could only be found in "the purest and most heroic times³¹". The danger of the improbable is even more palpably exposed when Duff says that the hero of the epic is primarily the invention of the poet's imagination whereas a writer of comedy, for instance, would form characters from "an extensive knowledge of mankind³²". In complete abnegation of Homer's practice, insight into character and psychology of behaviour is thus declared unimportant or even dissociated from epic writing. In its stead the celebrating of a pattern of virtue becomes the main concern of the poet. All the defects of such a conception—by no means Duff's alone—stand out in the following words: "Finding no character in real life every way suited to his [the poet's] purpose, his imagination amply supplies the defect, and enables him to form those complete models of excellence, which neither observation nor experience could furnish³³". The third type of character Duff mentions is that of "beings wholly different in their natures from mankind; such as Ghosts, Witches, Fairies, and the like, which may be termed supernatural³⁴". No mention is made of the possible human connections in these beings. Once a character is termed 'supernatural', probability ceases to be the standard by which to judge characters. We notice how little impact Homer's or Milton's practice of delegating human qualities to supernatural characters had on neoclassical minds.

Ogilvie, too, thought it essential that the epic hero and the actions in which he was engaged should be other than those normally experienced by anyone; probable actions, "however noble, are still human actions³⁵", and consequently "our admiration is imperfect³⁶".

We see from these examples that the eighteenth-century epic did exactly the opposite of what the novel did. It moved away from the individuality of the ordinary to the improbable. The hero was thus believed to reach once more the height of eminence which he had lost with his authentic heroism.

It is from this point of view, then, that the numerous statements concerning the hero's character have to be interpreted. The most telling manifestation of the hero's moral character can be found in Dryden. There is no doubt that if Dryden had written an epic poem he would have conformed to the

predominant spirit of eighteenth-century criticism which he himself helped to create; the reflections on the nature of the epic hero which he left us a few years before his death are too deeply pervaded by this spirit to allow any conjectures about startling innovations. Dryden relies on the typically neoclassical precept of 'nature to advantage drest'; the artist selects from a number of individual objects the most perfect features and combines them in a new ideal creation. "Painters and Sculptors, choosing the most elegant natural beauties, perfectionate the idea, and advance their art, even above nature itself, in her individual productions³⁷." This is the point where even Dryden fails to distinguish between working real nature to 'a nobler pitch' and stepping outside the bounds of nature altogether. The epic in particular, he says, presents us with "images more perfect than the life in any individual, and we have the pleasure to see all the scattered beauties of Nature united by a happy chemistry, without its deformities or faults³⁸". Dryden refers to the *Poetics* which in his view seemed to support this attitude; he points out that Aristotle 'recommended' the manner of Sophocles who painted characters "as they ought to be³⁹". But then he goes on to 'improve' on Aristotle in a characteristically neoclassical manner in that he makes this recommendation an absolute rule. "The Heroes of the poets", he says, "are to be drawn according to this rule⁴⁰"; from now on everything is derived from this pseudo-aristotelian precept: "there is scarce a frailty to be left in the best of them, any more than to be found in a divine nature⁴¹". The result is something which might be called a faultless monster, a denomination to which Dryden assents in a slightly ludicrous instance: he quotes the Marquis of Normanby who criticised the perfect hero as "a faultless monster, which the world ne'er knew⁴²" and explains that we must remember that this "excellent critic intended only to speak of dramatic characters, and not of epic⁴³" (!). Again, contrary to Aristotle, Dryden separates epic from dramatic character and defines the former as faultless, the latter as fallible.

Dennis's arguments sound very much like Dryden's, and there is much likelihood of his writing under the impression of Dryden's essay "On Poetry and Painting" which had appeared the year before: "In order to the giving this best likeness [of a character], a Poet is not so much to consult Nature in any particular Person, which is but a Copy, and an imperfect Copy of Universal Nature; he is to examine that Universal Nature; which is always perfect, and to consult the Original Ideas of things, which in a sovereign manner are beautifull⁴⁴". Reality of character is indeed mentioned by Dennis in the same breath with ideality, but once it has been said that a character ought to resemble some particular individual, ideality gains the upper hand and effects the extermination of anything that might have been called personal as distinct from universal. The great poet "is to do like a good painter, he is to draw his character like; but he is to conceal its Blemishes, if it has

any, and is to give it all the Embellishments which will not corrupt its Resemblance⁴⁵”, or, especially for the epic, “if History has given that King or that Captain, any shamefull Frailty, or low vice, which are unworthy of the Majesty of the one and of the high command of the other; the Poet is oblig’d to conceal that Frailty, and to dissemble that Vice⁴⁶”. According to Gildon, the epic sets before us “the idea of a much more perfect Pattern of Virtue than History can afford. For History proposes Virtue imperfect as it is found in Particulars, but Poetry proposes it free from all imperfections, as it ought to be in the General and in the Abstract⁴⁷”.

Quotations of that kind show plainly that to the neoclassical mind ‘idealization’ meant something that was altogether different from what it meant to Homer. The resemblance or likeness which the eighteenth-century writer likes to talk about is not ‘ideal’ in the philosophical sense of the word in that it emphasizes the predominant features of a character and thus typifies it; it is ‘ideal’ in the popular sense of the word, an image created by adding good, and eliminating bad characteristics. Thus ‘individuality’ is virtually reduced to a meaningless phrase by the tendency to raise character to the level of indiscriminate perfection.

Perfection, on the whole, proves the highest standard by which a classicist can judge an epic hero or an epic poem. Blackmore’s highest recommendation on behalf of the hero of his last epic, *Alfred*, is the absolute ideality of his character. Alfred is “blameless and unrepachable in his life⁴⁸”. Blackmore enumerates a long list of solemn virtues which Alfred was to have possessed, and rounds off the description of his character as only a neoclassical writer could have done it: “In short, his Character is so compleat, that there is no Ornament or political Virtue to be named, which he did not possess in an Eminent Degree; He is therefore fully qualified to be the Hero or general Character of the Poem⁴⁹”. None of Homer’s or Virgil’s leading characters could be summed up in this sweeping general fashion; the numberless qualities of the neoclassical hero only conceal his narrative weaknesses.

Pemberton enunciates a similar theory in connection with his observations on Glover’s *Leonidas*. If we are to form a just conception of the greatness of an epic poem, we have to find out how near the poet gets to a picture of sublimity and ideality: “we must review his characters, and consider what exalted degrees of magnanimity appear in his principal personages, especially the high spirit which shines forth in his [Glover’s] Grecian worthies throughout their whole conduct and most abundantly in their last fate; but above all that eminent pitch of human virtue, which animates Leonidas, their chief, whose heroism, unmixed with the impetuosity of boisterous rage, arises not from the principles of simple valour and intrepidity only, but from the warmest zeal for the public safety, strong affection for

the people, amongst which he shared the highest honours, and the justest indignation against tyrannical oppression⁵⁰". This critical attitude exactly reflects all the poetical shortcomings that characterize the neoclassical ideal. The dramatic element of unstable character—as displayed by Homer—disappears. The character of Leonidas is 'unmixt' with bad qualities, and in Pemberton's phrase there is an indication that he considers this an improvement on Homer's Achilles and his famous 'anger'. Personal concerns disappear in the face of the sacred cause, in the service of which all the energy of the hero is concentrated. A further point of merit in Pemberton's eyes is the fact that all the leading characters attain to a similar pattern of virtue. In a manner reminiscent of Blackmore, the uniform excellence of Glover's heroes enables him to embrace them all in one summary characterization: "I think our author in his principal Grecian heroes, and most eminently in Leonidas their leader, has represented with singular strength, and truth, virtuous characters of high spirit superior to the greatest misfortunes⁵¹".

Dr. Johnson, disappointing in everything he says about the epic, also demands a uniformly ideal hero, and like Dryden, Wilkie, Duff and others he goes as far as virtually to deny the necessity for 'consulting nature', for 'knowledge of mankind' or for 'observation and experience of life'. What he says about the novel is doubly binding for the epic: True pictures of life are too dangerous because of their imperfect and often ambiguous moral values. "When an adventurer is levelled with the rest of the world, and acts in such scenes of the universal drama, as may be the lot of any other man; young spectators fix their eyes upon him with closer attention⁵²". This interest in valid human experience, however, ought to be curbed, "for that observation which is called knowledge of the world, will be found much more frequently to make men cunning than good⁵³" and "it is therefore not a sufficient vindication of a character, that it is drawn as it appears⁵⁴". After thus decrying true human experience—an attitude which we find difficult to understand—Johnson proposes characters which instead of interesting us overwhelm us with their sheer grandeur (the typically neoclassical conception of the epic hero), men in whom "the power of example is so great, as to take possession of the memory by a kind of violence⁵⁵". For this purpose "care ought to be taken, that, when the choice is unrestrained, the best examples only should be exhibited⁵⁶". He could not discover(!), he says, "why there should not be exhibited the most perfect idea of virtue⁵⁷". Like many another critic Johnson hastens to add that he is not suggesting any angelical characters or such above probability, "but the highest and purest that humanity can reach⁵⁸". The borderline between 'the most perfect idea of virtue' and 'angelical virtue' is of course too indistinct to lend any weight to Johnson's argument. His anxiety to dissociate his heroes

from improbability only shows how near it he may secretly fear them to be; in reality, 'probability' means as little with him as anywhere else in the neoclassical school of thought.

According to Wilkie, "the proper business of Epic poetry is to extend our ideas of human perfection⁵⁹". Epic poetry sets before us "images of whatever is great and noble in the human character⁶⁰". Not only should the poet depict his hero as some individual character and magnify him by skilful management of outward circumstances, but also give him "all those intrinsic qualities which make man admired⁶¹". Again 'individuality' is mentioned but immediately drowned in the sum total of all virtues.

From a didactic point of view Brown sees the purpose of epic poetry in giving "abstract general Principles of moral Excellence or Blame⁶²" and considers this an advancement of "the more refined Periods of social and polished Life⁶³" over Homer, who, although unrivalled as a storyteller, had to be considered "an imperfect moral Painter⁶⁴" as he was "a compleat natural Painter of the Ways of Men⁶⁵", as he displayed the manners of ancient Greece "with all the appearances of Truth" and "with all their Imperfections⁶⁶".

The result of Duff's observations, who asks for a hero raised far above the level of ordinary men, is likewise the totality of all ideal virtues. The epic poet erects before our eyes "an illustrious model of virtue" to teach us "what we should be⁶⁷". Individuality is once more lost in the uniformity of the abstract values; by means of the inventive and combining powers of his fancy the poet "assembles those shining qualities which constitute the Hero, and exhibits them, united together with perfect symmetry, in one striking and graceful figure⁶⁸".

One of the weightiest arguments of Mickle in claiming a place among the modern epics for Camoens's *Lusiad* is the apparent conformity of its leading character, Gama, to the new conception of the hero. In him Mickle sees fulfilled and exemplified that improvement on Homer and Virgil which, in the opinion of the age, could only lie in the avoidance of anything unrefined, morally indifferent and weak. He cavils at the characters of the *Iliad* and the *Aeneid* and describes Gama's character as "that of the finished hero. His cool command of his passions, his deep sagacity, his fixed intrepidity, his tenderness of heart, his manly piety and his high enthusiasm in the love of his country, all are displayed in the superlative degree⁶⁹". The list of high epithets conveys absolutely no picture of one particular personality; it could be used for nearly every neoclassical warrior from Blackmore's Prince Arthur up to Ogilvie's Brutus. If we remember what Pemberton said about Leonidas, for instance, we notice the complete identity of his character with that of Gama as they appear in the wording of the critics. A similar description of the virtues desirable for epic heroes is given

by Blair in his *Lectures*, in which he significantly enough mentions no negative qualities: "Valour, Truth, Justice, Fidelity, Friendship, Piety, Magnanimity, are the objects which, in the course of such Compositions [epics], are represented to our minds under the most splendid and honourable colours⁷⁰". That only such characteristics should be given to the epic hero he derives from the alleged fact that "the end which it [the epic] proposes is to extend our ideas of human perfection⁷¹". Ideality, finally, is also Ogilvie's favourite conception of the hero; he is raised beyond man's usual limits and becomes a sublime character "in its highest perfection⁷²". The hero is a god in a human body: "When the figure is completed, and has received the last heightenings of a delicate pencil, it becomes a Divine Object⁷³".

This survey of the neoclassical theories concerning the hero's moral character shows with some distinctness that the idea of 'character larger than life' rests on an interpretation that deviates from that of Homer or Aristotle. It is not character which, owing to its controversial constituents, is dramatic in itself and, although monumentalized, still emphatically human; it is on the contrary character entirely made up of qualities that are morally positive in the case of the hero or morally negative in the case of the hero's opponent. We know that the purpose of any obstacle thrown in the hero's way is not meant to raise a problem that is solved, or remains unsolved, thanks to specifically human strength, cunning or weakness, but to raise his ideality even further by letting him triumph over the most formidable adversities. The hero thus moves within an atmosphere of unrelieved awe. Humour has no place, impish slyness of the Odyssean brand is below the dignity of a neoclassical hero, anger incompatible with his refined manners, tears alien to his equanimity. Everyday occurrences are too vulgar and immaterial to deserve mention and unnecessary for the ulterior motive; he is never seen eating unless at some royal banquet. The realism of Homer's battle, quite apart from being anachronistic in modern days, is reduced to lists of the fallen in order to disguise the harshness of war. The eighteenth century, far from looking upon this as a drawback and as the cause of the ensuing monotony of mood and diction, on the contrary quite encouraged it. "Even the least portions of them [epic poems] must be of the epic kind⁷⁴", says Dryden, which means that "all things must be grave, majestic, and sublime⁷⁵", everything else being foreign matter, misleading the reader into "another sort of pleasure, opposite to that which is designed in an epic poem⁷⁶" (admiration).

Blackmore particularly is a stickler for solemnity. Since admiration is the keyword for the epic "nothing is to be admitted there, but as it is admirable⁷⁷"; "in an Epick Poem everything should appear great and wonderful, the Thoughts cannot be too much elevated, the Episodes too Noble, the Expression too Magnificent, nor the Action too Wonderfull and Surprising, if

Probability be preserved⁷⁸". The latter condition put in edgeways is typical of neoclassical epic theory. It is supposed to mitigate the extreme character of the sentiments and actions postulated beforehand, which were of course felt to be rather dangerously close to improbability. But the meaning of probability in that age was rather vague and irrational; one would argue, for instance, that although a ship being turned into a rock or a fleet into a shoal of water nymphs are surprising occurrences, they are nevertheless probable "when we are told that they were the Gods who thus transformed them⁷⁹!".

Parnell in his essay on poetry denounces everything lighthearted and prosaic with the war-cry of "hence ye profane⁸⁰". The cause leaves no room for serenity; the poet's

*grave voice, controlling all the spells,
With solemn utt'rance, thus the Moral tells:
So public worth its enemies destroys⁸¹.*

In Gildon's *Art of Poetry* we read that everything in the poet's narrative must be of a nature that "partakes nothing of the base, and the Vulgar⁸²" and that everything must be "Noble and Magnificent⁸³". Elsewhere he says that "all ought to be Great and Majestic" in a heroic poem⁸⁴. Blackmore, nearly thirty years after his first deliberations concerning exclusive seriousness, once more raises his voice to remind us that the epic could not admit of anything ordinary and prosaic⁸⁵. This mood is often vented in criticisms of Homer or Virgil; the two poets are blamed for their failure always to comply with the (non-existing!) rule of sustained ideality in men and things. Trapp thinks that in Homer's poems "some things are related below the Majesty of Epic⁸⁶". Warton, too, with a host of similarly inclined critics, Pope amongst them, puts the 'blame' for Homer's occasional barbarism on the simplicity of the age in which the poet failed to realize that in an epic poem "all things must be grave, majestic and sublime⁸⁷". He greatly prefers Virgil—as can be expected from critics who represent the pure eighteenth-century temperament—because in the *Aeneid* "all is uniformly majestic⁸⁸". Ideal monotony is also implied by Blair who reminds the prospective writer of epic poetry that "all the objects which it [the epic] presents ought to be either great, or tender, or pleasing⁸⁹", and that "Descriptions of disgusting or shocking objects, should as much as possible be avoided⁹⁰". The character of the environment is thus a reflection of the ideas centered in the hero; a dream-landscape of the abstract theme of the epic. The hero has to move within surroundings sufficiently congenial to his high purpose. However much a poet may know about the life and habits of the hero's time, it is advisable, for the sake of the choric character of the epic, that he should imbue the hero's simple background with the spirit of modern culture rather than with that of the culture within which he actually moved.

Another instance in which the accidental value of the authentic hero in modern times becomes manifest.

Having dealt with the evidence of an undoubtedly very strong and confident school of thought that conceived of the epic hero as the sum total of all virtues, it may be of particular interest to note that Aristotle demands no such thing at all. The strange distortion of classical authority by the eighteenth century is particularly strong with regard to the epic hero. There are indeed no less than four instances in Aristotle's *Poetics* that invited the neoclassical interpretation of ideality:

1. In paragraph 15 he says about characters, the poet has to make sure "first and foremost, that they shall be good".
2. There is the idea of 'nature to advantage drest' from which all similar neoclassical paraphrases derive, where Aristotle compares to the poet the painter who portrays a person "handsomer than he is"⁹¹.
3. He asserts in the same context that tragedy, and also epic poetry, "is an imitation of personages better than the ordinary man".
4. He mentions Homer as exemplifying his theory, saying that "Homer's personages, for instance, are better than we are"⁹².

We do indeed, it seems, get the idea of good characters 'raised above the level of mankind'. Not that some critics did not realize that 'good' characters could also mean 'poetically good' characters, or characters that were good in that they provided a moral. In that sense they quite agreed that even the morally bad characters were 'good'. (Bossu had dealt with this point quite exhaustively in his "Treatise of the Epic poem", and he had many a follower in England.) This differentiation, however, did not in itself contradict the peculiarly neoclassical idea that in the case of the leading character of an epic poem, poetical goodness should coincide with moral goodness; a critic may have acknowledged the double meaning of the word good, but without concluding that this allowed for indifferent or mixed, or complex character in the case of the hero. We believe, however, that Aristotle used the term 'good' in the widest possible sense without equating it with ideality in the case of the leading character, because he applies it to every personage whether representing morally good or bad issues, and the fact that morally indifferent or often repulsive character—like that of Achilles—is taken into account under the same heading proves that no identification of moral and poetical goodness is made.

The second point which led the classicists to an exaggerated interpretation is that of painting character 'handsomer' than he is. Contrary to popular belief, this did not mean drawing a "flattering" picture of a man by adding good qualities and hiding bad ones; nowhere does Aristotle utter a word to the effect that a hero should be the sum total of all virtues. He only says that the poet should choose a man who engages our sympathy, which

means that he has certain good qualities that can be properly described. On the other hand his other distinctive but less likable features must be properly exposed. The poet in "portraying men quick or slow to anger, or with similar infirmities must know how to represent them as such⁹³". Aristotle's hero is quite definitely human and handsomer only in that his qualities and appearance are monumentalized in their characteristics. This is in fact the meaning of his third quotation according to which epic personages should be better than ordinary men. How else could we reconcile the character of Achilles with Aristotle's rule, if 'better' were synonymous with ideal or preterhuman? There are numerous occasions on which the Greek leaders bestow the most unflattering invectives and derogatory remarks on the character of the hero, depreciations which we accept as quite true and just. Yet in the fourth quotation Aristotle calls him a better man than we are. This can only mean that he is better in that he possesses the superior strength of a goddess's offspring. He is better than the average being in that he is the commander of huge armies; he is better in that he achieves much more than an ordinary individual could achieve; he is better in that he is instrumental to the eventual completion of the war; he is better in that he is the faster runner than any of us; he is better in that he displays more monumental grief or gratitude than we should; but for all that he is as indifferent or problematical a human being as we are and he experiences the tragedy of life in the same psychological perspective as we do. Only from this point of view does it become possible for Aristotle to avoid contradiction when he demands that the hero should be better and yet at the same time 'like the reality', or a man neither "preeminently virtuous and just" nor "depraved⁹⁴". With the classicists the same twofold precept fell flat because no synthesis could possibly be achieved between 'reality' and their kind of 'ideality'. Indirectly the nature of Aristotle's hero emerges from what he says about the characters of comedy: "as for Comedy, it is an imitation of men worse than the average; worse however, not as regards any and every sort of fault, but only as regards one particular kind, the Ridiculous⁹⁵". We could with confidence lay down a similar rule for heroic poetry which would run something like this: "as for heroic poetry, it is an imitation of men better than the average; better however, not as regards any and every sort of virtue, but only as regards one particular kind, the Heroic". In both cases the characteristics of true human experience are, if exaggerated, untouched and preserved in their real significance.

The touch of the ordinary in Homer and Virgil presented the supreme embarrassment to the eighteenth-century critics, because they could not dispute the fact that, unlike their own pattern of virtue, Achilles was an angry hothead, Odysseus an arch-schemer and plotter, a man with his tongue in his cheek, and that Aeneas, the closest approximation to neoclassical

refinement, did not always behave in a fashion worthy of an absolutely ideal hero. Usually they followed the attitude assumed by Bossu and his translator who blamed the "Unhappiness and Imperfections of the times"⁹⁶ in which the poet wrote for the fact that he did not exhibit "those perfect Hero's, and those noble Ideas of Virtue"⁹⁷ that Virgil more properly exhibited. In the *Aeneid* one could conveniently overlook certain unideal aspects in Aeneas's development since there was enough ideality left to cover them up. It was the same attitude that is often found with regard to *Paradise Lost*, where Adam and Eve are described, quoted and praised as paradisiacal beings and utterly ignored after the fall. Even so, much was said in vindication or censure of certain actions and reactions on the part of Aeneas where he was felt to be too human, as, for instance, in his delightful lacrymose tendencies. "And if Aeneas sometimes weeps it is not in bemoaning his own miseries, but those which his people undergo"⁹⁸ is a typical neo-classical excuse for a hero's weakness, and it enables the poet still to maintain that he held "the beauties of a God in a human body"⁹⁹. Equally typical is the reproof put forward by Welwood in the Preface to Rowe's translation of Lucan's *Pharsalia*, where he criticises the same Aeneas weeping in the storm: "Courage would have cost Virgil nothing, to have bestowed it on his Hero, and he might as easily have thrown him upon the coast of Carthage in a calm Temper of Mind, as in a Panick Fear!" Here we have another example of how persistently the eighteenth-century critics advocated the levelling out and monotonizing of the epic hero. Welwood is obviously much more at ease when praising the *Pharsalia*, compared with which Homer's and Virgil's poems appear trivial in his eyes. Lucan is the greater epic poet—irrespective of the fact that he contravened Aristotelian precepts in more than one point—because he raises his heroes beyond the ordinary: "what purely regards the Elevation of Thought, Pompey, Ceasar, Cato, and Labienus shine much more in Lucan than Jupiter, Mercury, Juno, or Venus do in Virgil. The Idea's which Lucan has given us of these Great Men are truly Greater, and affect us more sensibly, than those which Virgil has given us of his Deities: The latter has cloath'd his Gods with Human Infirmities, to adapt them to the Capacity of Men: The other has rais'd his heroes so, as to bring them into Competition with the Gods themselves. In a Word, the Gods are not so valuable in Virgil, as the Hero's: In Lucan, the Hero's equal the Gods"¹⁰⁰.

These instances sufficiently elucidate the peculiarly neoclassical conception of the epic hero which, in complete divergence from those rules which it often professed to follow, created a situation for the literary development of the epic genre that was anything but propitious. There arose, as already pointed out, the problem of forming individual character within a sphere that only consisted of ideally good characteristics in the case of the hero,

or of ideally bad ones in the case of his enemies. There arose the problem of how to make good the loss of dramatic qualities in the hero's character caused by the absence of conflicting passions in it. There was the problem of how to make good the absence of any development in the hero's character, since the cause demanded his ideality from the outset and made him a man who has stopped developing when we see him on the epic stage for the first time. There was also the tremendous task to find such an enthralling and well conceived story as to avoid with it all the disadvantages just alluded to. All these points are, we believe, best explained in connection with the epics of the century where they become more visibly fatal. Those who spoke in favour of the ideal hero were naturally disinclined to see and admit the weakness of their position, but the interesting thing is that many of them, by virtue of contradictions and concessions, contribute to the picture of dissolution which the epic presents in the eighteenth century. This aspect, together with the increase of open criticism of the ideal hero, will form the subject of the next chapter.

6. THE DISSOLUTION OF THE IDEAL HERO

The degree of ideality in the heroes of the eighteenth-century novel was largely a matter of the writer's individual taste; comparisons between characters such as Pamela, Amelia or Grandison on the one hand, and Roderick Random, Moll Flanders or Jonathan Wild on the other are sufficient proof of the wide range of moral worth that was encompassed by the novel. The ideality of the epic warrior-statesman, however, is more than an instance of accidental taste. It is commonly acknowledged to be a function of the abstract universal purpose of the epic which was to show how man ought to be; it is a consequence of the choric quality of the events and therefore inseparable from the conception of the epic as such. This mutual interdependence of the constructive elements of the epic is undoubtedly the reason, why the ideal warrior-statesman was so integral a part of the poem and why it was almost impossible to disregard him without causing the whole epic to collapse. From this point of view the victorious survival of the neoclassical hero well into the age of the Romantics appears not solely founded on the conviction that he was the ultimate word on the issue, but also on the fear that without him the epic tradition would have to come to an end.

Nevertheless the anti-neoclassical currents, by their sheer inevitability, were as strong and as compelling in this aspect of epic theory as in most others. Although the discussion concerning the hero's moral character was dominated by its ideality, it was not uniformly so. Within the long and

apparently uneventful history of the dying epic we can trace the beginnings of that new conception which through the demand for unideal characters began to undermine—often against the writers' own will—the position of the legitimate hero. Just as the warrior was here and there scoffed at as superannuated and even ridiculous in modern epic poetry—in many cases perhaps only because enough had been written about him—so the super-human hero, who united all abstract virtues in his character, was here and there the target of sceptical or even derisive remarks. The dissatisfaction would vent itself in criticisms of the unrelieved mood of painful solemnity which was the result of the hero's exclusively serious deportment and which infected every object in the hero's environment. Welstead complains of the monotony in the works of contemporary epic poets, grumbling "for my part, I acknowledge, the sprightly Nonsense of some Writers has far more Charms for me than the dull Sense of others"¹. Goldsmith, a vigorous figure of a new poetical generation, speaks of the influx of a "disgusting solemnity of manner into our poetry "which banishes all that agreeable trifling, which if I may so express it, often deceives us into instruction"². The cry for a more human hero and for the description of the 'insignificant' trifles of everyday experience did not indeed always go hand in hand with the rejection of the warrior, but it tended towards reinstating the truly Homeric type of character with all his personal worries and problems, and marks the beginning of that slow development, at the end of which rejection was the natural consequence.

Pope gives us the most sensible assessment of the situation, although he, too, seems to link his progressive ideas with the traditional, if not ideal, hero. That he so clearly saw the weakness of the eighteenth-century conception at such an early stage shows how urgent and controversial this problem must have been even in the early years of the century. Pope was one of the first to attack epic and even tragic poetry for its 'disgusting solemnity' in characters that everywhere manifested themselves in a "perpetual elevation of tone"³. He speaks of "that continued swell of language, which runs indiscriminately even thro' their lowest characters, and rattles like some mightiness of meaning in the most indifferent subjects"⁴. It is a criticism of the popular opinion that 'nothing but that it is admirable' should be permitted in an epic poem. Homer, Pope says, well knew the importance of contrast and variation in moods and characters. Although the subject of an epic should be serious, Homer introduced many peculiarly hilarious figures into his poems; in the sly, intriguing Calypso, the Suitors and the Phaeacians he portrayed characters that belonged to what we might call the "higher Comedy"⁵, whereas the Cyclops, Melanthius and Irus even "descended to droll characters"⁶. The reason why the sublime mood, as a result of the underlying ideality of cause and character, is so rigidly maintained by

the poets is, according to Pope, that bad writers are more easily misled into the belief that ideality is "more easily counterfeited than the natural". He then goes on to speak the momentous words that "nature, purity, perspicuity, and simplicity, never walk in the clouds⁸", and that our poets had forgotten to stoop to lower subjects because they thought 'familiarity' would mean diminution to universal greatness. An epic poet, he says, could not avoid descending in places "to the lower manner of writing", in which case "an elevated style would be affected, and therefore ridiculous⁹". Vociferating might be excusable in gods or inspired muses, but men are "speaking only according to nature¹⁰". Here was the call for beings in whom we recognize ourselves, a certain realism of manners that was felt to be absent from the epic poetry of the age. For the first time Pope praises Homer's realism, which means that he praises what for the average critic of the time was most emphatically an object of disapproval. 'Low action', in Pope's opinion, can have a peculiar charm and beauty: "There are numerous instances of this both in Homer and Virgil, and perhaps those natural passages are not the least pleasing of their works¹¹". In history, he adds, we often get the same effect "where the representations of common, or even domestic things, in clear, plain, and natural words, are frequently found to make the liveliest impression on the reader¹²", a fact that Homer knew full well when he made his heroes participate of this kind of familiarity.

The question immediately arises, how Pope saw this realism adequately conveyed in modern epic poetry. Was he satisfied with a repetition of antiquated civilization of which the modern poet only had a second-hand knowledge? Or did he think it possible to describe contemporary civilization in its growing complexity, and if so, whom did he see as the chief epic character of such a poem? Pope does not answer these questions; it is yet too early for that, but his words go to the very roots of the dilemma and demand of the epic what the subconscious genius of the age had already undertaken to realize in the novel.

Some consciousness of this is also discernible in Johnson; real life and experience exercised their charm also on the Rambler, who, although ultra-conservative on the subject of heroic poetry, has to admit that it is rather the description of everyday experiences that seem to take possession of people's minds in this age; in other words, the novel. "The works of fiction, with which the present generation seems more particularly delighted, are such as exhibit life in its true state, diversified only by accidents that daily happen in the world, and influenced by passions and qualities which are really to be found in conversing with mankind¹³". Significantly enough he contrasts this experience of true life with the improbabilities of epic machinery. The novel is "precluded from the machines and expedients of the heroic romance, and can neither employ giants to snatch away a lady from the

nuptial rites; nor knights to bring her back from captivity; it can neither bewilder its personages in deserts, nor lodge them in imaginary castles¹⁴".

Gordon in his studies on classical authors judges epic poetry by its power to represent human feelings and denounces the improbable in the epic, saying that he could not out of complaisance to a set of rules affect to be delighted with what he "neither felt, heard, saw, nor understood¹⁵". For this reason he admits that he is more affected by some of the recently published Erse poetry in which at least the poet "sees and speaks with human eyes, and a human tongue¹⁶". (He makes the same statement in his study on Ossian.)

In this context we may also mention Haylay who, like Pope, pays much attention to those parts in the ancient epics where real human experience is related. In the V. Epistle on the epic he speaks of a girl reading Homer, and asks us to guess what the girl is particularly delighted with:

*Say to what scenes her partial eyes revert!
Say what they first explore, and last desert!
The scenes that glitter with no heavenly blaze,
Where human agents human feelings raise¹⁷.*

Without presuming to be in any way epic Haylay offers a rather insignificant poem in six cantos entitled *The Triumphs of Temper*, of which he says in the preface that "the following production owes its existence to an incident in real life", which was the more justifiable as "the ages, indeed, are past, in which the song of the Poet was idolized for its miraculous effects".

But the voices that gave expression to the growing demand for human actors and daily happenings effected little in practice. They were disregarded because no one knew how to materialize these demands and because in the end the poet was not prepared to entrust the cause—which still exercised its strength—to the hands of a less than ideal hero and to a less than ideal environment. Particularly in the epic, unideal character was also regarded with suspicion for didactic reasons. There are numberless criticisms of the fact that complex characters, because of their few good qualities, might mislead the reader into an undesirable sympathy, whereas on account of their imperfections he ought rather to detest them. On these grounds the old ideal was still contemplated with more favour by many who, on the other hand, acknowledged the superior attraction of real characters in fiction and thereby admitted the imperfections of the epic in this respect.

The struggle between complex and ideal character is perhaps best illustrated in the frequent fact that even where the ideal hero was favoured, he was at the same time expected to conform to a recognizably human psychology and was thus supposed to be both ideal and unideal, outside experience and

yet probable, universal yet individual. How untenable and meaningless, for instance, Dryden's precept of the ideal hero is, becomes apparent when we compare it with what he has to say about the plainly unideal Achilles: In the same breath he establishes a rule according to which the epic hero ought to unite all virtues in his character and that particularly his most typical virtue ought to be a sublimely serious one, but devaluates this rule by saying that Homer's Achilles is "a kind of exception to this rule¹⁸", since "he is not a perfect hero, nor so intended by the poet¹⁹". To all intents and purposes this means that the poet must choose a perfect hero unless he intends to make him imperfect. In similar ways the ideal hero again and again received injury after injury from the very critics who defended him. Dennis postulates, as we remember, that the epic hero ought to be an image of universal perfection rather than an imitation of nature in ordinary men. On the other hand, he holds that "the Poet, who forms a character, by whose calamities he designs to melt or terrifie his Audience ..., ought to make that poetical Person resemble them as much as he can²⁰". Quite justly he argues that the greater the resemblance between the sufferer and the commiserator, the stronger would be the effect of the former on the latter. In this case it would be advisable to make a character a compound of virtues and faults, not "guilty of great Crimes", but neither "sovereignly virtuous²¹" as is the "generality of Mankind²²". If Dennis makes a point of saying that a character should induce the reader to identify himself with it, and that this could not be achieved by a character too bad for probability, we should expect him to say the same about characters that are too good for probability. But Dennis excludes the epic hero from his precept; the tyranny of the cause forces him to maintain the ideal hero despite his alleged shortcomings. The result is that the task of 'resembling ordinary men' is delegated to inferior characters of the poem, a stratagem with which the classicists tried to have the cake and eat it; i. e., to satisfy both their craving for abstraction and their demand for everyday experience.

Similarly Pemberton confuses the two kinds of characterization. On the one hand, he judges the hero by his ideality, sublimity, his stoicism and superiority in the face of adversity. This does not hinder him from taking it for granted that the epic must "bear an exact resemblance to the real actions of men, and that the characters be a true picture of human nature²³". Pemberton agrees that a true picture of human nature is one in which "virtuous and vicious dispositions, good and bad passions, prudence and folly are variously intermixed in the same person²⁴" and that therefore there was no compulsion to represent characters "that are not in every particular worthy of imitation²⁵". The portion of good sense in these words is again outweighed by the dictates of refined morality which in his praise of *Leonidas*

cancel everything said in favour of complex character. Like Dennis and Dryden, he makes perfection and imperfection separate issues.

Brown's attitude belongs to the same line of thought. He readily ascribes Homer's greatness to the fact that he did not describe ideals, but real beings "with all their imperfections²⁶", although eventually, from a moral point of view, he declares ideal personages more desirable.

Similarly Blair makes concessions to the complex character when he says that it is "by no means necessary that all his [the poet's] actors be morally good; imperfect, nay vicious characters may find a proper place²⁷" but hastens to add that imperfect characters, however, are only to be given to subordinate figures; the hero himself remains the ideal person.

Ogilvie also acknowledges the poetical superiority of complex character and estimates it higher than the usual type of hero representing virtue or vice. "It is indeed a task incomparably more difficult to exhibit a variety of distinct qualifications as combined to form one character, than to parcel these out as it were among many persons, and to assign each a separate virtue or vice which along with a few common and subordinate acquirements complete the exhibition²⁸". Unfortunately he disregards his own words when it comes to practice. Again the chief hero of his poem is presented as a uniformly ideal man in the true neoclassical tradition. Ogilvie knew that for the perfect hero it is an impossible task to assume the interest and psychology of the ordinary man and still to remain perfect in the neo-classical sense of the word, and therefore he, too, proposes to leave him on his pedestal and to assign the task of representing human experience to characters of lower standing than himself. "This task must be left, in a great measure at least, to human actors, whose passions, in order to produce any great effect, must correspond, and their hearts vibrate in union with those of their own species²⁹". Ogilvie defines the inferiority of this popular practice most palpably by thus literally dividing characters into those that engage our interest and those who do not; he renders a bad service to the cause of the perfect hero and exposes the ridiculous position of the ideal conception.

If on the one hand we have many cases in which ideal and complex character vie with each other unsuccessfully for supremacy, there are, on the other hand, a number of criticisms in which ideal character is frankly ridiculed as poetically undesirable. Already Pope recognized familiar experience and realistic background as essential ingredients of the epic poem. He also recognized in the ideal hero the peculiar characteristic of the eighteenth-century epic and ridiculed him in his "Receipt" as early as 1717. "For those [the manners] of the hero, take all the best qualities you can find in all the celebrated heroes of antiquity; if they will not be reduced to a consistency, lay them all on a heap upon him³⁰". In the preface to the translation of the *Odyssey* Pope reflects in seriousness on the problem of

ideality and complex character, and we can sense from the tone of the argument the strong opposition that any critic who spoke against the perfect hero must have had to face at that time. Pope knew, of course, that Homer was criticized by a great number of scholars for the moral shortcomings of his chief characters, and he tries to convince the reader that Homer was right in what he did, and that the ideality advocated by his contemporaries was the bane of epic poetry. "Let us reflect", he argues, "on the effects it would produce in several Poems, whose Authors were of opinion, that the chief character of a hero is that of an accomplish'd Man: They would be all alike, all valiant in Battle, prudent in Council, pious in the acts of Religion, courteous, civil, magnificent; and lastly endued with all the prodigious Virtues any Poet could invent³¹". Now this is precisely the same sort of all-embracing virtue which Blackmore, Pemberton, Mickle and others advocate, with the difference that Pope looks upon it from exactly the opposite point of view and quite correctly condemns it as the road to universal dullness. Characters, he says, ought to be poetically good "but it is not necessary they be always morally so³²". For Pope, hiding defects in a character did not mean leaving them unmentioned. Neither Homer nor Virgil conceived of this in such a way and Aristotle—Pope is one of the few truly Aristotelian critics—who derived his precepts from Homer expressly stated "that the Hero of a Poem should be neither good nor bad, neither advanc'd above the rest of mankind by his Virtues, or sunk beneath 'em by his Vices³³". Homer, he says, knew the dramatic asset of mixed character and did not even represent Odysseus, the better of his two heroes, as an ideal man; he is not shown in the "full light of glory but in the shade of common life with a mixture of such qualities as are requisite to all the lowest accidents in it, struggling with misfortunes, and on a level with the meanest of mankind³⁴". Once again we may say that the medium which has materialized the essence of Pope's remarks about the epic purpose is in fact the novel, and although it would probably be too bold a statement to say that Pope conceived of the novel as the continuation of the epic purpose, it is certainly correct to say that wherever relevance of character and human experience were recognized as the decisive factors in epic writing, the result was nevertheless likely to resemble the kind of environment and character which the novel had made popular.

Less convincing is the rejection of ideality by Trapp. Like many others he would like to find the borderline between ideality and near-perfection or probability. "As to the forming of a Hero, he is not to be represented adorn'd with every Virtue, as a Character entirely perfect, because there is no such Thing in Nature; but he may advance as near as possible to that Perfection³⁵". The question of course is where the author feels the possible to give way to the impossible, a question which Trapp leaves unanswered.

There is more directness and conviction in the words of Wilkie, who calls the ideal epic hero an 'artificial' character as distinct from the 'natural' one. Artificial character he describes as inspired by morality only and consisting "in a habit of mind formed by discipline, according to the cool and dispassionate dictates of reason³⁶". The disadvantage of this type of hero, according to Wilkie, is that it is "far less poetical than the other³⁷", i. e. the natural one, "being less fit for interesting our affections, which are formed by the wise author of our nature for embracing such beings as are of the same temper and complexion with ourselves, and are marked with the common infirmities of human nature³⁸". Natural character therefore "implies all those feelings, passions, desires, and opinions which men have from nature and common experience, independent of speculation and moral refinement³⁹". Consequently epic characters "should never be formed upon a perfect moral plan, but have their piety, (for instance) tinged with superstition, and their general behaviour influenced by affection, passion and prejudice⁴⁰". To have both goodness and weakness in an epic hero could be thought a paradox only "by such as do not know that imperfect characters interest us more than perfect ones⁴¹". From this point of view it seemed a natural conclusion for Wilkie—who still believed in the warrior and the cause—to revert to a more truly Homeric tradition. He was probably the only epic poet of the century who did so, although he might have foreseen that this reversion could produce little more than a repetition of something already told by someone who was obviously the greater writer and who on top of that could rely on the eye-witness's experience and vivacity. Wilkie's mistake was that he did not apply his theories about 'mixt' character to men of his own age but to men of archaic surroundings and quaint actions. The marvellous and the improbable encroached once again on the 'natural' hero, because it was simpler to write a good story with traditional epic raw material.

Webb sees the outstanding weakness of contemporary epic poetry in its sustained sublimity and ideality. "To describe a permanent and unchangeable glory, is to paint without shade⁴²." He praises Milton's Satan as the outstanding achievement of *Paradise Lost* because even he whom we associate with evil personified is depicted as a being with a complex character and therefore endowed with dramatic interest and power.

Beattie, speaking of the novel—though elsewhere he indicates that his thoughts are applicable to poetry as well—is of opinion that neither positive nor negative ideality should be exhibited. He blames Richardson for having painted his leading characters too perfect; although we may admire them as saints it is impossible really to love them as human beings, as their being "so distant, and so formal" forbids all familiarity and cordial attachment. On the other hand, Beattie recognizes Fielding's Allworthy as the example

of a good and lovable man: "his virtue is purely human; and, having a little of our own weakness in it, and assuming no airs of superiority, invites our acquaintance, and engages our love⁴³".

Heron criticizes in Tasso's epic what most other writers praise: his ideal heroes. Homer, he says, had more sense than that: "As in life itself, his virtuous characters have vice, and the vicious virtue. A writer without experience thinks the more perfect his characters are in vice and virtue, the more perfect they are in poetry. The reverse is the truth. Mixed characters are alone fit for the purposes of fable. Milton knew this so well that he paints Satan himself as a dubious character⁴⁴." "Perfect characters form indeed a sure mark of a middling writer⁴⁵." Heron was one of the rare critics who saw the danger of ideality not only in good but also in bad characters, whereas for the ordinary eighteenth-century writer it naturally followed that the ideal representation of the good issue should be counter-balanced by, and contrasted with, the representation of the bad issue by ideally evil characters. Just as the hero was the cause personified, his enemies were vice personified and showed as little drama and development of character as the hero himself.

The outcome of the controversy concerning the hero's character was, on the whole, a victory of the conventional neoclassical pattern. But it was obviously a Pyrrhic victory. It bore all the marks of its own exhaustion. The fear of the void rallied the spirits of the ideal warrior-statesman, even though his doom was pronounced in the words of those who were still faithful to him.

7. THE GOD-ASSISTED HERO - RIVALRY BETWEEN GOD AND MAN

It is the tragedy of the eighteenth-century epic that its sponsors, in their enthusiasm to adapt its message to their own age, forgot to ask themselves whether the various elements or characteristics of the authentic heroic poem were not perhaps inalienable from their authentic meaning; they forgot to ask whether the change in the meaning of the traditional requisites might not perhaps destroy their technical, dramatical function within the new epic. The negative results, which were never successfully accounted for by the puzzled eighteenth-century writers, are the documents of the fatal neglect to examine the different re-uses of the traditional trappings from the point of view of sheer epic and dramatic craftsmanship. How detrimental to the position of the new hero this neglect was, becomes nowhere so obvious as in the instance of 'epic machinery', i. e. in the employment of celestial agents who interpose on behalf of, or against, the human personages engaged

in the action. The controversy about these 'machines' in the eighteenth century is in itself an interesting subject of research and may appear to be only loosely connected with the problem of the hero himself. We must, however, say a word or two about it, because it is again the hero who suffers from their presence and who, in his turn, destroys the artistic purpose of the Gods as Homer or Virgil saw it and who impoverishes the epic by creating a relationship between the gods and himself in which no dramatic moments are left.

Far from being everywhere a subject of dispute, celestial actors were naturally accepted throughout the century as an integral part of the epic structure—first and foremost because Homer had employed them—and the thought of dispensing with their service certainly never occurred to many a writer or critic of the age. Pope's genius bears witness to this fairly common and uncritical attitude, and he certainly aptly characterizes the taste of a majority of authors when he declares in his "Receipt" with mock-solemnity, that "no epic poem can possibly subsist without them [the machines]" but gives no reason why not, apart from the rather ludicrous one that they afforded a splendid means for dunces to extricate with them their heroes when they found themselves at their wits' ends. Pope's humour thus ridicules the frequent attitude that, although reason might assert that machines were not absolutely necessary, the sense of tradition nevertheless vindicated them and reinstated them as a practice sanctioned by the past. "If his [the poet's] engaging of invisible Powers in the Action is not absolutely necessary", argues Blackmore, "yet at least it highly conduces to the Embellishment of the Poem, and the making it sublime and admirable¹". Belsham admits that it cannot be denied that "most celebrated Epic poets have uniformly called in the aid of supernatural agency with great success and advantage; and that it is not easy to conceive of an Epic poem destitute of machinery, which should not appear comparatively tame and spiritless²". Ogden pays tribute to the past by stating that a poet is "well warranted in the use of it [machinery], by the uniform practice of all those who have attempted this species of composition, and succeeded in it; by supposing human actions to be influenced, and even produced by the direction and interposition of superior Agency, from good or evil Spirits ...³". We can also feel the force of tradition in a mass of formulae defining epic poetry as a poem about a hero chosen and manipulated by the Gods. As typical instances of this matter-of-course attitude which, as we know, went well beyond the alleged neoclassical age, we may quote Warton's phrase, according to which "one may define epic poetry to be, a fable related in verse ..., representing to us the action of an hero, favoured and assisted by heaven, who executes some grand design⁴", or the similar formula from Ogden's preface to *The Revolution*, according to which the epic is a poem "representing

the Actions of an Hero, favoured by Heaven, in the execution of a grand design⁶". As a further proof of the strong allegiance to epic precedents we may also mention the fact that out of the twelve big epic poems which are discussed in this study only three renounce the services of heavenly agents, and since one of them, Cockings's *War* may more properly be called 'contemporary history versified in the epic manner', only one poet, Richard Glover with his *Leonidas* and his *Atheneid*, remains as a writer of more truly poetic epics without the employment of machines. Although one would have thought that in the age of reason the actual appearance of fabulous beings was likely to meet with more scepticism than ever before, they on the contrary satisfied the neoclassical outlook in that they enhanced the unusual and exclusive position of the hero in an epic poem. In view of the great store the classicists set by him as an object of admiration, we can easily understand that the machines greatly appealed to them as a means of raising the hero's ideality even further above common experience. The very character of the epic hero called for a confirmation of his worth by the Gods. How persistently this idea of exaltation by means of celestial assistance runs throughout the century can be seen in the sameness of most remarks both at the beginning and at the end of the period. Dennis, in 1701, writes: "Admiration which is the Reigning Passion in Epick Poetry, I mean that which is admirable in the action of the Hero, is heighten'd by Revelations, by Machines, and the Ministration of the Gods. For that Ministration, those Machines and those Revelations are all Miraculous. And the Man who was admirable before for his extraordinary Valour and his Native Greatness, becomes more wonderful, when we behold him the esteem and immediate concern of Heaven, when we see him the peculiar care of Providence ...⁶." Ogilvie, exactly a hundred years later, refers to the same heightening of our concern and admiration when we see the hero in the esteem and care of heaven. It is through the machines that the hero is "exhibited to the highest possible advantage⁷". Without machines the task of raising the hero above experience "is effected with difficulty; and when effected, we obtain only the lowest order of the sublime, that which originates in, and is wholly constituted by, human exertion. When we introduce Intelligences of superior nature, all this labour is saved: A Great Being is presented before the mind, to whom it immediately assigns particular qualities. A character is therefore formed at once, wherein the powers of man are raised beyond their usual limit: and Imagination expands to embrace it." Between these two statements there can be found scores of others to the same effect; they afford the means to circumvent reason and exalt personality, because once the Gods appear on the stage "poets may tell of them [the heroes] what great things they please, without seeming to exaggerate, or say anything that exceeds the bounds of probability⁸".

But here was the point where the new conception began to adulterate the poetical merit of the ancient Gods. The greatness of the heavenly beings is looked upon as a means to raise the hero to their own level, the hero is identified with the sublimity of the Gods. Although his superiors they are in reality subservient to him in order to make him as great as they are themselves. For him the Gods no longer represent kind or adverse fate as they did for Homer's heroes; he himself, through his identification with the Gods, is fate personified. He is God's Messiah or Saviour of the enslaved and of the spiritually misled. He is a heavenly ambassador, the deputy of God implementing God's plans on earth, and his true home is Heaven. The dramatic quality of the clash between the will of fate and the will of the hero is lost in the united purpose of God and hero. Thus it is not man's volition which is the mainspring of the epic action, but God's plan and orders and, contrary to Homer's outlook, the godhead assumes the central position; he becomes the very heart and soul of the poem instead of just an important factor in the hero's struggle. "The very Nature of such a Composition [an epic poem] consists in a religious Sublimity" proclaims Blackmore⁹. In the opinion of Trapp an epic poem stands and falls with the sublime marvels of religion, and therefore "the Dignity of an Heroic Poem would scarce be kept up without it [machinery]¹⁰". For Warton, too, religious majesty is the essence of epic poetry and for that reason he deems sublime machinery indispensable; the same holds good for Duff. Mickle also praises and supports superhuman agency and says that without it a poem "must want the marvellous, which is the very soul of poesy; and hence a machinery is indispensable in the Epic Poem¹¹". For Ogilvie once more the sublime and the marvellous are not just embellishments or narrative devices but the very cornerstones of the epic.

The shortcomings and restrictions which the hero and the Gods thus mutually imposed on one another become obvious when we take into consideration the fact that since the hero was an ideal character serving an ideal cause the Gods in their turn had of course to be ideal. Two important consequences resulted from this predicament: Firstly the poet was forced to deny and abandon the Homeric principle of the Gods endowed with human psychology and imperfection, for naturally it was unthinkable that an ideal hero should be made to execute an ideal undertaking conceived by Gods who were below the hero's moral character; with the classicists the Gods reached the petrified state of eternal righteousness. Secondly, it seems inevitable that on the grounds of these reflections the epic machines had to be, and wanted to be Christian "in contradiction of a thousand Boileaus¹²". Christian mythology alone could lend the air of righteousness and infallibility in which the cause and its hero had to appear. We feel, of course, that the choice of the Christian Revelation is much more a matter of religious

responsibility before poetical suitability than vice versa. It is moral indignation that conquers the doubt whether heathen machines were not perhaps more desirable than the poetical weakness of the True Religion. Even Dryden rashly condemns Homer for the apparent fault that all his Gods had "somewhat of human imperfection¹³" and praises Virgil—in the absence of any other famous epic where the same could be said—who "observed his [Homer's] fault; and mended it¹⁴". Dennis's assertion that Christian machines are also poetically superior in fact only rests on religious and not on poetical reasons: "As our Religion gives us more exalted notions of the power of an Infinite Being, than the Heathen Religion did to the Grecians and Roman Poets; it consequently produces a stronger Spirit, in Poetry, when it is managed by those who have Souls that are capable of expressing it¹⁵." Or witness the outcry of Blackmore: "The Gods of the old Grecians and Romans were in the Opinion of the People and the Poets an impure, vile, and immoral Race of heavenly Beings, infamous for Adultery, Rapes, and Incest, Intemperance, Theft, Falshood, and Revenge; and are such Machines fit to be employ'd in an Epick Poem¹⁶?" Or "how would a Christian Poet be received", he says contemptuously, "should he compile and publish an Epick Narration according to the Plan of Mahomet in his Alcoran¹⁷?" This latter remark is particularly amusing; it sounds as though the mortified Doctor had been visited by the yet unborn Robert Southey announcing the impending compilation of *Thalaba the Destroyer* or of the *Curse of Kehama*! The pagan system of religion, he sums up, is "inconsistent with, and destructive of all Merit, Industry and Distinction between Good and Evil¹⁸"; it destroys the epic, indeed not poetically, but what is more decisive, in its moral purport.

The reviewer of Kedington, however far ahead of anyone else in other respects, is still of opinion that "intriguing gods... fill us with ideas of contempt and horror¹⁹". Brown has kinder words for Homer, whose Gods he declares to be natural objects conceived by an imagination trained in a time of fierce, warlike and treacherous activities, in which case it followed naturally "that the Pictures both of Gods and Man will accord to this Principle in such a Period²⁰". The implication is of course that owing to the changed notions about manners and religion in modern times, the imperfections of the Gods would no longer be permissible. Richards also objects to Homeric tradition on religious and not on poetical grounds: "The Introduction of Fables and Allegories amid the awful Revelations of our Holy Religion, is vicious in the extreme" and no reverence for great names should "withold us from the condemnation of a practice, which levels to human conceptions the dignity of the Supreme Being, and thus deprives piety of its fairest and fundamental support²¹".

In the shadow of these conceptions, which forfeited the drama of man's fight against destiny, the distinction was made from the outset between

‘good and evil spirits’; the hero is ‘favoured by heaven’, he is the ‘care of providence’. God and man become an invincible entity, and since they stand for everlasting righteousness, the forces opposing the decrees of heaven are crippled and ineffective at their best. For the sake of extreme contrast, or ‘distinction between Good and Evil’, God’s enemies are necessarily recruited from the army of the Apostate who is now no longer the evil principle in the making but the symbol of eternal damnation. Thus, with the issue between God and Lucifer clarified and settled beyond appeal, the outcome of the hero’s adventures is never in doubt. Both God and the hero create for themselves what from the human point of view is a very cowardly and self-complacent position that makes us pity the devil on account of his irremovable handicap. On the other hand the faculty of omnipotence is not sufficient to distinguish between God’s and the hero’s ideality, and since the hero’s marvellous achievements more often than not make more stir than God’s decrees, the latter is in constant danger of being degraded to the role of a sublimely bored bystander. It was not the presence of Christian machines as such that was undesirable in an epic poem—Milton proved the contrary—, it was the machinery demanded by the neoclassical type of hero which was responsible for poetical failure.

Nobody pointed out the poetic virtue that lay in the fact that Homer’s heroes were not just ‘favoured by heaven’ and opposed by evil powers, but absorbed by an inscrutable fate beyond good or evil; that thereby the drama of life assumed a mighty significance and a truly human perspective, and that the very impact of Homer’s poetic world rested on the fact that the Gods were not abstractly conceived idealities but such as, owing to the limits of human understanding, man’s mind was daily prompted to conceive of. The neoclassical epic God was a God of poetic justice, of predictable moral character. He himself was the source of the universal idea which the hero materialized as his right hand.

Lastly we notice once again that Aristotle says nothing about the necessity for epic machinery. The marvellous has a completely different meaning with him; it is only a convincingly framed lie, a lie that rings with the sound of truth (“Homer more than any other has taught the rest of us the art of framing lies in the right way²²”). The last doubts as to the meaning of ‘framing lies in the right way’ should be dispersed by the examples Aristotle gives us in his *Poetics*: the landing of Odysseus on the island of the Phaeacians; Achilles chasing Hector round Troy²³ or the statue of Mityls at Argos killing Mityls’s murderer by crashing down on him at some public spectacle²⁴. The tales about the Gods he puts in the same category and they are subject to the same condition, namely, that their actual occurrence would have to be “in accordance with opinion²⁵”. There is, however, not the slightest intimation as to their forming a basic constituent of an epic poem.

The only poet who in some measure reverted to the Homeric principle is Wilkie who in the *Epigoniad* reinstated the 'intriguing gods of antiquity', reasoning that "the superior beings which are introduced must of necessity be represented as assuming the passions and opinions of those whom they favour²⁶". In the *Epigoniad* they are employed on a very moderate scale, but the important thing is that they give him a chance to deal with imperfect human character without insulting the dignity of the Christian God.

A rather amusing solution to the celestial dilemma was contributed by Ogilvie. He argues that the Christian Religion is one "whose laws permit not imagination to blend opposite qualities together in such a manner as to form picturesque and original representation²⁷". The characters of his poem, therefore, invoke the Greek Gods whilst the author occasionally throws in a remark to the effect that although these ancient people knew no better it was in fact God and his Angels who acted in response to their prayers. Thus Ogilvie solves the dilemma between his moral responsibility and the requirements of his narrative. Even so he makes little use of the freedom he thereby gains, because the existing identity of cause and hero renders the heathen Gods again uniformly ideal.

The majority of eighteenth-century critics certainly favoured the use of celestial actors in an epic poem. If there is at all a discernible tendency towards their rejection and towards a victory of reason against improbability this may be said to set in during the second half of the century, i. e. at the alleged impending close of the rational age. In the first half of the century we only find a few particularly acid wits who ridicule not so much the presence of the Gods in epic poetry but the way in which their contemporaries handled them. There is Swift with his "Advice to a Young Poet", in which he says that "the Sublime indeed is not so common with us; but ample amends is made for that want, in great abundance of the admirable and amazing, which appears in all our compositions²⁸". There is, of course, Pope who laughs at the Gods as they appear in the works of the imitators: "For the Machines take of deities, male and female, as many as you can use. Separate them into equal parts, and keep Jupiter in the middle. Let Juno put him in a ferment, and Venus mollify him. Remember on all occasions to make use of volatile Mercury. If you have need of devils, draw them out of Milton's Paradise, and extract your spirits from Tasso ...". At a later stage the author of an article in the "Gray's Inn Journal", although wishing that Mr. Glover had not completely abandoned machines in his *Leonidas*, concedes that indeed he had "ever been of Opinion, that all the Writers of heroic Poesy have, in general, been too fond of the Marvellous²⁹". Much more outspoken is Gordon: "There is no doubt to be made, but that a poet with a parcel of Deities at his heels, to serve in the capacity of dressers and sceneshifters, may work many notable feats; and give us more

sublime accounts of things, than a poor unassisted mortal can do³⁰." However, if the poet thus gets "upon a flying horse, or I see him beginning to soar upon the eagle-wing of his muse into the clouds well knowing that my dull clay is too heavy for such rapid travelling, I immediately leave him to pursue his airy journey alone and quietly keep myself where I am³¹". More seriously he lays down: "To change the appearances of things here, or to fill this world with beings which we cannot see, is an affront to our senses³²". From a poetical point of view the use of machines is censured by Heron: "A situation can never be intricate, nor the reader ever in pain about the catastrophe, as long as there is an angel, devil, or magician, to lend a helping hand³³". Reality, as we have already noticed under a different heading, becomes more and more the key-word of epic criticism, although it fails really to alter the structure of the genre. Machinery destroys the plausibility of the events and therefore "nothing is more unnatural. Its effects, at the same time, are deplorable. First, it gives an air of fiction to the whole; and prevents that impression of reality, which is requisite to interest our affections, and to move our passions. This of itself is sufficient to explode machinery³⁴". Haylay finds fault with the Gods for similar reasons; he looks upon scenes of common life as the best parts of an epic poem and upon the marvellous as its greatest danger:

*If then within the rich and wide domain
O'er which the Epic Muse delights to reign,
One province weaker than the rest be found,
'Tis her Celestial Sphere, or Fairy Ground:
Her realm of Marvels is the distant land,
O'er which she holds a perilous command;
For, plac'd beyond the reach of Nature's aid,
Here her worst foes her tottering force invade³⁵.*

This curious development towards 'reason' confirms our hypothesis that the history of epic poetry differs in many ways from that of the other literary genres. As far as the problem of the Gods and all its contingencies are concerned, the first half of the century as the proper age of enlightenment was far more irrational and illogical than the second. Even so, the voices of reason were of little avail as long as the closely interlocked system of hero, God and cause persisted in dominating the imagination of the majority of the critics.

These reflections also enable us to set a comparative basis for the assessment of Milton's position. We have frequently had occasion to point out his divergence from most of the maxims propounded by the classicists, and there is no aspect more suited to define Milton's genius and the position of the epic at that crucial moment than this problem of epic machinery. Here

we feel with particular emphasis the enormous set-back which the epic experienced in its age of dissolution—to no small degree hastened by its inexpert handling of Milton's machines—and how utterly impossible it was for those critics to grasp from their critical angle the significance of *Paradise Lost*. The incompetence displayed by otherwise redoubtable men such as Dryden, Johnson and others with regard to Milton's poem, and a century of epic practice which appears doomed by Milton's precedent, show clearly that for them *Paradise Lost* had been written well over a hundred years too early. As regards machines it may for the present moment suffice to point out that Milton

1. realized the importance of an existing antagonism between, instead of identification of, hero and God; that
2. he realized that the opposing powers had to be given an equal chance of success; that
3. he succeeded in reconciling this plan with the Christian Religion as the appropriate spiritual background of his age—without creating an impression of irreverence, and that
4. he did so by singling out the one episode where this was at all possible. Milton indeed perfected the purely Christian epic but exhausted it in the attempt, as the eighteenth-century writers were to find out at their own cost.

8. CONCLUSION – THE EPIC AND THE MEANING OF 'RULES'

The neoclassical epic hero, as he emerged from the struggle of wits, had little in common with classical precedent. The whole of the eighteenth century was one long attempt to define its own genius. It was the very absence of acceptable rules (always excepting a few fundamental principles which are independent of transient taste) that engendered a flood of criticisms meant to explain a new spirit not hitherto defined. Even the epics themselves were illustrations of new theories rather than independent works of art and directed towards the reconstitution and improvement of the epic species. In that sense they formed part of eighteenth-century criticism, in contrast to Homer's poems that were the basis for Aristotle's theories. Every single one of those epics strove to prove the possibility of a 'new hero' and to cope with the ensuing problems. Thus every writer, if related to purely classical tradition, automatically took it on himself to be in some measure 'irregular'.

This quality of persistent 'irregularity' in the eighteenth-century 'formalism', which is nothing less than a sign of its creative energy, is usually quite overlooked by modern criticism. The decline of the epic is believed to be

characterized and explained by a too rigid observance of classical authority at the beginning of the century and by the gradual rejection of rules and the ensuing dissolution of the pseudo-homeric pattern during the later stages of the eighteenth century. This is indeed the conclusion which we are inclined to draw from a superficial examination of the history of rules. Swedenberg speaks of "striking changes¹" in literature as the cause of the marked tendency in the second half of the eighteenth century to reject rules altogether; by taking this development at its deceptive face value, he equates the growing number of authors objecting to rules with a certain literary evolution, in the course of which the epic became something new.

But this change did not take place. The eighteenth century in its entirety is united in the same unchanging spirit of conscious or unconscious opposition to classical authority.

What then is the changing attitude towards rules to signify?

When critics speak of a constant questioning of 'rules', of a decrease in the justification of 'them', or of the fact that no writer accepted 'them' casually, or that they finally rejected 'them' altogether, they use a word which has no meaning unless they explain what each individual writer meant by it, and, above all, with what kind of conception of the epic he justified his accepting or rejecting of 'rules'. The struggle between 'rational precepts' and 'unfettered genius' is not productive of two different kinds of epic poetry. The likelihood of a stronger evidence of unqualified rejection of Aristotle's rules in the second half of the century is less significant than the fact that this shift from precept to genius did not affect the end-product.

The peculiarly equivocal value of rules concerning the eighteenth-century epic manifests itself most strikingly in Blackmore's work. He began his career as an epic writer with a heroic poem which he proudly declared to be written in true Virgilian style. Nobody, he thought, had for a long time past heeded classical authority and he attributes to this neglect the poor standard of English epic writing. "That the modern Poets have been so unsuccessful, has not, I imagine, proceeded so much from want of Genius, as from their Ignorance of the Rules of writing such a Poem; or at least, from their want of attending to them²." What Blackmore did, however, was not to write a poem based on Aristotle's laws as he professed to do, but already here the neoclassical temperament imposed on these laws that type of hero which we have described as being altogether incompatible with the spirit of epic tradition. Unluckily for Blackmore there were enough inconsistencies and flaws in his epic to enable the critics to condemn it by means of the very precepts it was claimed to be built upon. Blackmore's reaction is very interesting. Convinced of the soundness of his endeavours, he comes to the conclusion that Aristotle must be incompetent, and he therefore disowns him. His second epic, *King Arthur*, is absolutely identical with the first in

spirit and matter; but this time Aristotle is of no account, rules are intolerable fetters, "the Essential and Fundamental articles, for want of which a Poet is justly condemn'd, are very few"³. Later still he had the boldness to say that he had "always vindicated the liberty of the modern Poet, and asserted his Independence on the Example and Authority of ancient Writers"⁴, and that he must therefore "declare against the Criticks and Commentators on Homer and Virgil, who would mortify the Moderns, and rob us of our Liberties, while they seem to tell us, that it is Rebellion against these Princes of Poetry, not to imitate their Examples"⁵. All the pros and cons in the discussion of the 'rules' are only a reflection of the desire to vindicate the specifically eighteenth-century 'new look' of the epic, first by rashly endorsing rules and afterwards, through the consciousness of being different, by decrying them. But in view of the absolute identity of his two poems, of which one was to prove the validity of the classical precepts and the other their irrelevance, it is incorrect to speak of Blackmore's fundamental 'change of position' as Swedenberg does. The apparent change is only a confirmation of what Blackmore had always been: a specifically un-aristotelian, neoclassical writer. His opposition to 'rules', obviously, only denominated an attitude which assumed the liberty of making its own rules.

That a modern epic had to be different from the old models was an opinion by no means unusual even in the early years of the century, and the reasons for the decline of heroic poetry were frequently attributed to the practice of too strict imitators. Rules were often held to be synonymous with copying, imitating, and were subject to suspicion for that reason. Already Dryden stressed the importance of being different. It is not the task of the poet, for instance to 'imitate' Virgil, but to imitate 'like' him⁶. The transitive and the intransitive forms of the verb have completely different meanings. The former means 'repeating Virgil', the latter 'being true to nature'. Just as Virgil was true to his own age, the modern poet should be true to modern times and the end-product might look quite different in both cases. In fact, Dryden says in the same essay on the epic that the poet ought to avoid reminding his reader of Virgil. Yet at the same time, he asserts that "without rules there can be no art"⁷, or that "Homer and Virgil are to be our guides in the Epic"⁸! The acceptance of rules by Dryden means the same thing as their rejection by Blackmore. The paradox is created only by the different meanings applied to the word 'rules'. Blackmore identifies it with copying the ancients, Dryden with perennial laws underlying the ever changing outward appearance of art; what both of them want is to preserve the liberty of being emphatically contemporary, of finding rules for a new epoch.

In the last resort this is the intention of every author, whether he admitted it or not, or whether he still entertained the erroneous belief of following

Aristotle's laws. We need only regard a few more examples of criticisms for and against rules. Dr. Johnson professes to be against the rules of the past; he attacks the multitude of critics who time and again repeat what has been said by others before them, who in their turn have no other merit than that "having read the works of great authors, they have observed the arrangement of their matter, or the graces of their expression, and then expected honour and reverence for precepts which they never could have invented⁹". That there should be some kind of rules, however, he does not deny. On the contrary, his apparent contempt of what critics say about them does not concern rules as such, but their secondhand nature. His ideal is a system of rules which are original and have "the certainty and stability of science¹⁰". Rejection of rules means little more than introducing new ones.

Then there is the translator of the *Lusiad*. In the preface he shows nothing but contempt for those who worship classical authority and rules, but at the same time, he hails his own age as one in which "criticism had given her best rules to the modern muse¹¹", rules through the observance of which Camoens, had he known them, could have become an even greater epic poet. It is on essentially neoclassical criteria that Mickle is willing to put the case of Camoens as a fully-fledged epic poet.

Even for Pope, being against rules means nothing more than a concession to the necessary neoclassical amendments outside the scope of classical authority. Pope did not rouse his generation—or any generation of the eighteenth century—with startling new theories, he only represented neo-classicism at its best. And yet, he rails against rules in his *Dunciad*, where he says that "as it bareth the name of Epic, it is thereby subjected to such severe indispensable rules as are laid on all Neotericks, a strict imitation of the ancients; insomuch that any deviation accompanied with whatever poetic beauties, hath always been censured by the sound critick¹²". His opposition is not directed against contemporary notions about the epic but against servile imitation of subjects already treated by the Ancients; whatever the critics say in the way of general poetical principles, is unnecessary talk about matters of course; in the terms of another critic: "A Sett of very obvious Thoughts and Observations, which every Man of Good Sense naturally knows without being taught¹³", or "a pert insipid Heap of Common-Place ..., touching only the Externals or Form of the Thing, without ent'ring into the Spirit of it¹⁴".

On the other hand, the conclusions of those who were convinced of their defending Aristotle's genuine rules are little different from the conclusions of those who rejected them. Everywhere concessions have to be made to that specifically eighteenth-century independence which was felt to be necessary for a successful continuation of epic practice. This phenomenon is indeed already foreshadowed in the translator's preface to Bossu's

“Traité”. W. J. conjectures that one of the chief reasons for the declining state of epic poetry is “their [the poets’] notorious neglect of following the Rules which Aristotle and Horace have prescribed: This and not the want of Genius has been the true Cause why several of our English Epick Poets have succeeded so ill in their Designs¹⁵”. He believes that he is a true Aristotelian, whereas in reality he does not follow Aristotle but Bossu who is specifically neoclassical. The conflict is more acute in Dennis. In the dedication to his *Reformation of Poetry*, he talks with much gravity and portentousness about “a time when the Rules are neglected by some and slighted by others” and undertakes to prove “the necessity of observing those”, since otherwise “we must absolutely despair of making any advancement in Poetry”. His views on *Paradise Lost*, however, contrast strangely with this rigid formalism. Milton’s poem was, in the opinion of Dennis and all classicists, a very irregular poem (although it was far more Aristotelian than anything produced by them); nevertheless, it was a poem one could not help being impressed by, and Dennis argues that since it did not profess to observe rules it was wrong to apply them to it. He goes as far as to say that Milton “had discernment enough to see, that if he wrote a Poem which was within the compass of them [the rules], he should be subjected to the same Fate which has attended all who have wrote Epick Poems ever since the time of Homer; and that is to be a copyist instead of an Original¹⁶”. Dennis’s attitude is typical of the dilemma in which authority and originality struggled with each other for supremacy. It also shows that the neoclassical mind could not dissociate a poem based on Aristotle from a detailed resemblance to Homer’s epics, a fact that proves their failure to understand Aristotle as a critic of epic poetry. In any case the value of rules is questionable if any obligation to observe them ceased as soon as a poet declared that he was ‘different’.

The same process of reducing the meaning of rules ad absurdum is also visible in Gildon’s *Laws of Poetry*. The title itself suggests the presence of a formalist mind. Gildon, like Dennis in his *Remarks on Prince Arthur*, comments on Blackmore, saying that he felt himself “oblig’d to prove the mistakes he [Blackmore] has fallen into”, particularly so because of “a very culpable neglect of weighing the validity of Aristotle’s Precepts¹⁷”. Like Dennis he revels in detecting the slightest aberrations from the ‘rules’. But again like Dennis, he cannot deny the beauty of irregular greatness; he admits that although Homer’s or Virgil’s genius can be explained by rules, Shakespeare, Spenser and particularly Milton touch the soul of every man who possesses “true Genius for Poetry¹⁸”. True genius, apparently, had no need of rules. More than that, it went against them.

The vindication of rules is, of course, not the exclusive characteristic of the earlier years of the century; in the year 1790, for instance, Ogden can

still appeal to old-established authority and declare in agreement with the Chevalier Ramsay that an epic poem consists "in a recital of one grand, entire, and marvellous action, or event, which is true in fact, or at least probable. Herein the manners of the actors, and speakers, are characterized with propriety, and so heightened by the art of Poetry, as to excite admiration, and inspire readers with the love of Virtue, by representing the actions of an Hero, favoured by Heaven, in the execution of a great design, which he finally accomplishes; and triumphs over all the difficulties which oppose him in the progress of that narrative¹⁹." Ogilvie, ten years later, says that he did not propose to write another dissertation on the epic poem, since this had been done before him by many another critic²⁰. These words are expressive of how little need or desire he felt to add anything new or unusual to the prevailing opinion of the age. Both authors think highly of 'rules'. But these rules already comprise those innovations and amendments which the eighteenth-century epic underwent in the course of its rejuvenation; they sanction the 'improvement on the ancients' which is the war-cry of the modern epic poet. Their poems testify to this fact.

We come to the conclusion that the controversy for or against rules does not essentially affect the peculiarly eighteenth-century conception of the epic. It certainly does not affect the conception of its leading character. Every piece of evidence goes to show that beneath this change the neo-classical conception of the improved Homeric pattern was handed from generation to generation till, in the new century, it either died of exhaustion or was replaced by something fundamentally different. If, on the one hand, then, we have a group of critics who strive to establish rules for their own age, and if, on the other hand, we have a number of critics who reject rules altogether, but whose conception of the epic hero coincides with the essence of the rules laid down by the other group, then we can assume that these two controversial attitudes are in fact only different manifestations of the same purpose: to adapt the epic to modern standards.

This tendency is even more striking in the actual poems of the time. If we are now going to examine them, we have to expect something that is indeed strongly indebted to classical examples, but which is also, in important respects, remarkably contemporary.

The Epic Poems of the Eighteenth Century and their Heroes

1. THE EPIC POEMS OF THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

It is not a matter of coincidence when in an age in which the epic as an art-form was sacrosanct, none of the great poets undertook the task of writing such a poem, but contented himself with paying his homage in theoretical deliberations, or by translations of the masterpieces of the past. The difficulties which had to be overcome were such as only attracted lesser talents who greatly underestimated them. From the point of view of literary criticism, however, the initiative of those who put into practice their new ideas, is doubly valuable. It not only provides us with a concrete picture of the eighteenth-century epic, but also exemplifies in its failure the problems which may have seemed less insoluble in their merely theoretical contingencies.

The poems of the age are even less conventional than their underlying precepts and show the endeavours of their authors to achieve the much clamoured-for 'improvement' on the classical models. Even if at first sight the classical elements seem to dominate, this should not blind us to the fact that they only form a transitional link from ancient to modern concepts. Though similar in appearance, every single poem appears like a 'testrun' for the new hero. It may suffice for the moment to point out that in his Arthurian epics, for instance, Blackmore set out to establish the specifically eighteenth-century Christian stoic as the hero of poetry 'more than heroic', that in *Eliza* he undertook to replace the authentic warrior by a woman of recent history, that with *Alfred* he paraphrased in a new fashion the Renaissance theme of a King in the making and abandoned the purpose of telling a heroic story, that Glover divested the epic of its machinery in the attempt to be more realistic, that Wilkie hoped to save the dramatic qualities of the hero by returning to the theme of isolated heroic individuality, that Ogden grappled with the difficulties of modern warfare and its ensuing loss of individuality, that Ogilvie once more rejected modern history as a suitable epic background, but tried to reconcile eighteenth-century humanity with characters of a legendary past¹.

In view of the absence of any marked linear development of the epic conception we need not observe a rigidly chronological order in the discussion of the various poems. The very similarities and affinities between them which caused the epic products of a whole century to emerge as a

singularly clearcut entity, would merely have to be reiterated in connection with every single poem and would thus render our study unduly repetitive. It seems more advisable to base our discussion on the various aspects enumerated in chapter III and to draw from one or several poems whatever references seem adequate to confirm and explain them. Although the individual poem as a rounded work of art will, of necessity, suffer by such an approach, we can nevertheless afford to pay little attention to this fact, since no poem impresses its purely artistic merit more forcibly upon us than its symptoms of the epic crisis. And this, precisely, is the subject of our discussion. In order to provide the proper background for it, we have to give the synopses of those poems which best represent the salient features in the history of the eighteenth-century epic. We cannot go as far as to point out all the details of plot, episode and character which were obviously taken over from the great epic poets of the past. Their use and adaptation will immediately become apparent to him who is familiar with those works, and serve as an additional clue to the specifically neoclassical conception that becomes manifest in these poems. The majority of them will thus easily be recognized as being at the same time deeply indebted to Homer and Virgil, and yet extremely unlike them in spirit and purpose. Wherever Christian machinery is used, Milton's example adds to the list of authoritative sources, although it must be remembered that this resemblance is as arbitrary and superficial as that between the Ancients and the classicists. In the comparative chapter on *Paradise Lost* and the eighteenth-century epics, we shall have occasion to comment on this matter at greater length.

RICHARD BLACKMORE: *Prince Arthur*

An Heroick Poem In Ten Books (pp. 296), London 1695.

Written in heroic couplets (and occasional triplets).

(I) The story of the fall of Lucifer and the triumph of the Christian Religion over the Infernal Powers introduces the two poles between which the story of Prince Arthur is enacted.

Lucifer—towering over a promontory of the Isle of Wight, fearful of impending disaster from the hands of Prince Arthur—catches sight of the hero's fleet and army which have set out to liberate the British Isle from the pagan usurper and tyrant, the Saxon king Octa. Hate of the pious Prince and his cause, the impossibility to corrupt the hero's soul by assailing his virtue, prompt Satan to let his enemy perish through the sheer violence of a storm which is raised with the aid of his evil ally Thor. Although Uriel—commissioned by God—succeeds in calming the angry seas, Arthur and his army are shipwrecked on the desolate coast of Armorica (Brittany) and have to undergo a severe test of their trust in God's providence; a test, however, which they stand manfully thanks to the influence

of Arthur's unflinching religious fervour. At the dead of night Raphael appears before the hero who is meditating on the wonderful power of devotion, and reveals in his speech Arthur's final triumph in arms and his future kingship. Meanwhile the Infernal Powers—thwarted in their black designs—hold council about their next move against God's plans. In the face of Arthur's apparent inviolability they decide to send a Fury to Hoel—the heathen king in whose territory the Britons lie shipwrecked—with the intention of inciting him to the destruction and plunder of the shattered host. This plan is duly executed and about to succeed, when the mighty voice of God stops Hoel in his course and orders him to seek out Arthur and to hearken to the Prince's words. Hoel obeys, overawed, and speaks to the hero of the strange and compelling force of the divine voice. (II) Arthur recognizes his duty as a missionary, and in glowing images he gives the king an account of the creation of the world and (III) of the terror and the bliss that will follow on God's pronouncing of the Last Judgement. Hoel—profoundly moved—is converted to the Christian faith and lends his assistance to the shipwrecked Britons; once more Arthur and his army are saved. (IV) After friendly banquets, sports and songs, Lucius tells Hoel about the fortunes and adversities of his friend, Prince Arthur: The Saxons under their cruel king Octa had defeated the ravaging tribes of the Picts and Scots, but had, in their turn, set themselves up as the tyrants of the country and—owing to base treason—crushed a heroic rebellion staged by Arthur's father, King Uter. Inspired by the command of Gabriel, who had appeared before the Prince and blessed him with a vision of a glorious future, youthful Arthur had committed himself into voluntary exile at the court of King Odar in Normandy, on whose behalf he had waged successful wars against the Goths during ten years. Now, the death of King Uter and the fame of his son's heroic deeds had induced the suffering Britons to call Arthur back to their succour and deliverance. Engaged in the execution of this mission, the fleet had been scattered in the recent storm and thrown upon the coast of this country. — (V) The ships have been repaired and are ready to set out for the British Isle once more. Panic-stricken, and with little hope, the Infernal Powers try to hold back Arthur's fleet in the harbour by means of another storm. Lucifer appears before the tyrant Octa in order to allay the king's fears with a false promise of a final victory over Arthur. In the mighty clash of the two fleets, however, Octa's ships are scattered and only partly saved by a shroud of mist laid over the scene by Lucifer. As a sign of the importance of this victory Arthur's dead father, King Uter, appears in yet another vision before his son, not only to repeat the prophecy of his imminent succession to the vacant throne, but also to paint a gallery of the future British kings up to William III. (VI) Hailed by the freed people of Britain, Arthur sets foot on his native soil. Reason prompts Octa not yet

to challenge Arthur's fervour and might. He sends a delegation to the jubilant Britons—engaged in warlike games—proposing peace and the marriage between his beautiful daughter Ethelina and Arthur. The Prince—a peaceful man at heart, although a warrior—gives his consent. Octa's secret plans of revenge, however, chance at this moment to become favourably influenced by the circumstance that Arthur's soldiers—intoxicated with victory—fall victims to slothful and lecherous living, whereupon—by God's consent—the army is struck by fatal diseases. Arthur's fervent prayers move God to stop the progress of the epidemic, but (VII) the Fury Bellona—commissioned by Lucifer—aptly chooses this moment to talk Octa into attacking the enfeebled host of the invaders. In this hour of need the Britons—in profound contrition—cry for God's mercy, whereupon Raphael appears before Arthur, pronouncing God's forgiveness and granting victory to their arms. In Octa's camp the air is pregnant with evil forebodings. Augurs predict defeat. A mirage on the horizon shows a terrible battle between hellish spirits and victorious angels. Even Merlin, the famous sorcerer, fails to cast evil spells on the enemy and is driven by God's voice to announce impending disaster. When the armies engage in battle, the decimated ranks of the Britons are miraculously strengthened by a host of warring angels. (VIII) A catalogue of the fallen recounts the violence of the battle, which eventually sees Arthur and his soldiers victorious, although Satan very nearly succeeds in disheartening the army by causing a Saxon to flourish on his spear a blood-besmeared effigy of Arthur's head. The Prince's humanity is shown by his graceful compliance with the entreaties of a young woman to spare her lover's life. (IX) A ten-day truce is agreed upon; funeral rites and games are held. Treacherous Octa, however, clandestinely wins the Scots under their giant King Tollo for his foul plans of vengeance and attacks the Britons with a mighty host. (X) Again the war is renewed and a list of the fallen tells of violent slaughter. Lucifer, in a last attempt to spare the tools of his treachery, hides his shattered armies in fog, darkness and storm. On the following day the cunning Scots try yet to save the day by proposing a mortal combat between Arthur and the giant Tollo, whom they think too strong a match for the British Prince. But to the consternation of the enemy and the exultation of the Britons, Arthur slays his opponent and crowns the final triumph of his mission with this heroic feat.

RICHARD BLACKMORE: *King Arthur*

An Heroick Poem in Twelve Books (pp. 343), London 1697.

Written in heroic couplets (and occasional triplets).

The liberation of his native country is only one of many political and heroic deeds that pious Arthur—now King of the Britons—is destined to achieve.

(I) Seven Gallic and Frankish nobles are led before the king to offer their fervent supplications for help against the godless tyrants under whose misrule their peoples are groaning. Arthur immediately recognizes in them the same men by whom he had been visited the night before in a dream. He knows that the liberation of these peoples is his sacred duty and pledges his assistance to the noble messengers. They praise him as the deliverer of Europe. Arthur summons a vast army (which is celebrated in a catalogue of heroes) and sets out first to liberate the country of the Gauls from the rule of Sardan, and later on to turn against the Frankish usurper Clotar. (II) Once again Lucifer is roused from his infernal depths. Perched on the highest pinnacle of Paris he watches the approach of the hated army. A council is summoned to debate on the actions to be taken against the delegated king. A plan is adopted according to which discord is to be stirred up during Arthur's absence amongst those whom he had left behind. At the same time the Gauls—though deserted by their coward king Sardan—are encouraged also to prepare for the war against Arthur's armies; a catalogue of heroes tells of the Gallic might. (III) Lucifer commissions the Fury to sow discord amongst the Britons at home. In the disguise of a dead friend she visits Morogan, who nurses some deep grudge against his king, and incites him to contrive a conspiracy with the help of those churchmen who look askance on Arthur's tolerance of the Church sects. A chance occurrence precipitates the outbreak of an open rebellion: bribed by King Clotar, the Portuguese lay hands on the spoils of an Asia-bound British convoy after it has been wrecked in a storm, and the conspirators manage to hold Arthur responsible for the disaster. (IV) The king—having been informed of the situation at home—acts quickly. He at once attacks Clotar's armies on the river Oise and wins a first victory; Clotar himself is wounded. (V) With a chosen few Arthur then embarks for his native country. In a council on the ship, indulgence towards the conspirators is agreed on as the best method of attaining a quick settlement of the dispute. The news of Arthur's coming causes many an intimidated renegade to change his mind. The king proclaims a general amnesty and wins his enemies by employing them in high stations; a catalogue of high-ranking officials and churchmen is given. The country pacified, Arthur hastens to rejoin his armies on the Continent. (VI) Lucifer, despairing of the unequal fight, now asks God to withdraw for a while his protecting hand from Arthur and to allow him to put the king's virtue to a test. Satan is granted a fortnight, and Arthur's fortitude—now merely human—is tried in a violent storm that drives him far from his destination, is tried in the heat of a desert, in the fight with a horrible dragon, in a dark forest haunted by hellish spectres, in an encounter with the irresistible seductress Fascina. He is about to yield to her artifices and wiles when the appearance of Gabriel announces the end of the time

allotted to Satan and places Arthur again under the protection of Heaven. He continues on his way to his army. (VII) In the meantime a battle has been raging between the Britons and the Franks. Deprived of their leader, the former put up but a half-hearted fight and are about to lose the day when a quick-witted soldier spurs them on with the cry of Arthur's sudden arrival. This faked piece of news is sufficient to rally the sunken spirits of the Britons and to strike terror into the hearts of the Franks. (VIII) The victory is, however, overshadowed by the capture of the great Clovis—one of those patriots who had come to ask for Arthur's help—by the enemy. Thrown into a dungeon and put to tortures, he refuses to abjure the Christian faith and even succeeds in converting by his example his own wife, who has come to reason him out of his martyrdom. His steadfastness is rewarded by God who sends down Uriel to lead him from his prison. (IX) At the same time King Arthur arrives back in the camp and is enthusiastically welcomed by his troops. The sage Caledon preaches a sermon on God's omnipotence and wisdom and hails the great heroes as His tools on earth. (X) When another victorious battle against Clotar brings the Britons yet nearer final victory, (XI) Lucifer resolves to stage another desperate attempt to save his own cause. He inspires the Frankish crook Palmida to lay a scheme with intent of murdering Arthur when negotiating about peace with the Franks. The plot is discovered to the king by an upright Frank, and Arthur uses the spectacular occasion of the public ratification of the peace to expose the enemy's treachery. The Franks hastily withdraw their army into Paris, pursued by the indignant Britons. The outer bastions are taken. (XII) In despair Clotar consults a dead friend who is conjured up for him by a magician. He is told that the Christian God will triumph and that he, Clotar, will soon be in the grave. This prophecy comes true on the following day when the tyrant king perishes in the battle and Arthur, at the head of his army, gloriously fulfils his task with the conquest of Paris.

RICHARD BLACKMORE: *Eliza*

A Poem in Ten Books (pp. 305), London 1705.

Written in heroic couplets (and occasional triplets).

(I) Lucifer's victory in the Low Countries—where political and religious freedom are being suppressed by the cruel Spaniards—is endangered by the approach of a British army sent to Flanders by Queen Elizabeth to bring relief to the suffering people there. The hellish council decide to effect the withdrawal of the British troops and to safeguard the infernal dominion of the Netherlands by instigating an unheard-of invasion of England by the Spaniards. A Fury is sent to Philip of Spain in the night when the king is being haunted by the threatening images of the murders and outrages which he has inflicted on that truly religious and freedom-loving country. The

demon causes Philip to drown his fears in renewed villainy and to order a huge armada to be built for the invasion of Eliza's country. (II) In England the Fury manages to find a number of abettors of the infamous project among a party of Papists and disgruntled Protestants, who inveigh against the Queen and her ministers, Burleigh and Vere. In Rome the Pope pledges his full support of the planned invasion. Vast preparations are made to carry out the gigantic project. Meanwhile, Eliza is made acquainted with these doings and calls her troops under arms, but Treachery—obeying Satan's order—causes Philip to approach Eliza with protestations of his peaceful intentions. A treaty of non-aggression is to be signed in order to lull the British suspicions. (III) The Spanish ambassadors are royally received and entertained in the queen of cities and the treaty is signed. Nevertheless, Eliza finds reason to doubt the sincerity of the Spaniards, and her fears seem well grounded when Christ delegates Gabriel to admonish the Queen not to slacken in her military preparations. In the meantime, the British troops under Vere have established contact with the native forces under Mauritius and prepare to assault the Spaniards under Mansfelt near Bruges. A catalogue of the Spanish leaders follows, (IV) contrasted by a list of the united armies, their leaders and modern equipment. A battle is fought and won thanks to Vere's inspiring leadership. The victory is celebrated and Vere—for the benefit of his continental friends—gives a retrospective account of Eliza's wise government, (V) of her church policy as the great protectress of the Protestants, of her moderation in the persecution of the Catholics in spite of the depraved methods employed by Papal Rome. He tells of the murderous plot conceived against the heroine, and how the murderer—overawed at the sight of her majestic personality—had been powerless to execute his black deed. (VI) Meanwhile the gigantic Armada has set sail for the British Isle. Gabriel—the guardian angel—provokes a violent uproar of the seas which destroys part of the fleet. Whilst Eliza proclaims a day of fasting and prayers, Howard and Drake repeatedly swoop down on the disorganized Spaniards and inflict heavy losses on them. It is only by means of raising a veil of fog, that thwarted Lucifer can avert complete annihilation of his fleet. In England the army—inspired by the fervour of Queen Eliza who is seen marching at its head in person—is ready to meet the enemy. At sea Drake causes renewed havoc amongst the shattered Armada by driving burning vessels amongst the Spanish ships. Wrecks found on the shore are discovered to contain the horrid tools of the Spanish Inquisition. The English traitors are disheartened and filled with terror; Montal—their leader—kills himself in despair. (VII) The glorious victory is celebrated by a service at St. Paul's after a triumphant parade through the streets of London. In the evening fireworks and banquets crown the festivities. Spenser—the bard—sings of the war in Heaven, of Satan's revenge and protection of the

godless, of the triumph of God's own people over the Egyptians. (VIII) The Queen continues meditating and praying after the feast and is carried up into Heaven by Gabriel for a glimpse of eternal bliss. The angel also gives her an account of the happenings in the near future. In the meantime the British have been attacked by Mansfelt near Bruges. The united British and Belgian troops win another victory. In this battle great Vere loses his valiant son Alban and yields to the overmastering power of his paternal grief. (IX) The body is transported home to St. Alban's where Fleetan holds a sermon on the mysteries of death. Now Vere prepares for a third battle against the Spaniards. Another attempt by Satan to foil the British cause by poisoning Vere, ends in failure when the Apostate—in his uncontrolled fury—instills too strong a dose of his hellish rage into Lopez who has been selected to commit the outrage, thus making him perish in madness. The Spaniards have now taken up an entrenched position near Deynsa, enforced by the army of Albert of Austria whose heroes are enumerated in a catalogue. (X) Edward, Cranmer and Seymour appear before Vere in a dream heralding the imminent victory of the British. A phantom battle on the horizon confirms this prophecy. Vere attacks the enemy and defeats him. Vast numbers of the fleeing Spaniards are drowned in the river Legia. This pharaonic disaster—prophetically anticipated by the inspired song of Spenser—signifies the fulfilment of the righteous British cause.

RICHARD BLACKMORE: *Alfred*

An Epick Poem in Twelve Books (pp. 448), London 1723.

Written in heroic couplets (and occasional triplets).

(I) Prince Alfred—accompanied by his friend and adviser Guithun—embarks on a voyage to visit foreign kingdoms, where, in order to prepare himself for his future kingship, he may study the laws, customs and various forms of government. Lucifer—though powerless to prevent the prince from pursuing his cause—tries to delay the hero on his way to glory. In the storm which the demons of the air raise at his command, Alfred and his companion are driven from the Italian coast and shipwrecked on the coast of Numidia. Overcome by heat and toil they at last discover a refreshing little stream. Here Alfred is attacked by a panther, but he manages to lock the beast in his iron embrace and to drown it in the river. A hermit—guided to the two castaways by a heavenly vision—entertains them hospitably in his cave, discoursing with them on constitutional problems. (II) Silva, the hermit, relates the story of his life. He had successively been appointed preceptor to the sons of King Garcia of Navarre at Pampelune, Bishop of Navarre and Councillor of State. But by exercising too liberal criticism of the royal government's abuses he had incurred the king's displeasure and the hate of a party of churchmen who were largely responsible for the cor-

ruption in the state. These men had been contemplating his unlawful removal when a vision warned him and directed him to seek this desolate Numidian cave. He advises Alfred to pass on to Tunesia where the prince experiences the power and the prosperity of a free people; Guithun launches forth into praise of liberty. (III) They are royally entertained by King Halla of Tunesia and impressed by the high reputation enjoyed by the arts. Alfred confesses that, far from being an admirer of arms and battle only, he himself pays tribute to the muses, and that he is planning to support the arts and sciences when king. At Halla's request he sings an ode on Divine Wisdom. When the prince has retired, Guithun remains to relate their recent adventures. (IV) He tells how they had crossed over to Antwerp and travelled through Germany, and describes the grandeur of the alps and their journey across them to Rome where the Pope—from an uncommon esteem—had crowned Alfred King of Britain in due succession to his father Atulpho. After many festivities, discourses and adhortations Alfred had left Rome with the Pope's benediction. They had embarked at Ostia for Naples on which journey they had been overtaken by a storm, thrown up on the Numidian coast and directed to Halla's court by an inspired anchorite. – (V) The Prince takes leave and sails to Naples, where he is courteously entertained by King Artolan, and shown the various curiosities of the town and the country. At this moment a rebellion happens to be staged by some of the king's dissatisfied subjects. When an armed conflict seems unavoidable, Alfred—who has inquired into the just grievances of the rebels—steps between the ranks of the combatants as a mediator and manages to reach a satisfactory settlement without bloodshed. A few of the courtiers who are dismissed in consequence of these events plan to murder Alfred, upon whom they look as the perpetrator of their disgrace. But their leader—who had been discharged from prison owing to the Prince's clemency—reflects on his own ingratitude and discovers the plot. The conspirators are sentenced to death, but again pardoned on Alfred's noble-minded intercession. (VI) The Prince's and Guithun's voyage to Sicily is described. There they find the people—unlike their good king—dissolved in idleness, debauch and corruption of manners. About to visit Mount Aetna, he is warned by an angel, that Lucifer—intent on destroying him—has resolved to let him perish in an eruption of the famous volcano. The angel directs him to a safe place where he can watch the terrible spectacle, a catastrophe which God suffers to take place as a means of punishing the slothful inhabitants of the island. At Alfred's prayer the eruption ceases and the demons who caused it are driven away. Under the impression of the disaster Guithun reflects on the signs of a possible general conflagration which may eventually end the physical existence of the world. (VII) Now the Prince—splendidly entertained at the court of the king—grows negligent himself and falls in love with Albana,

a beautiful but worthless woman of royal descent. Though warned by Guithun, he continues on his dangerous path and is duly punished by a severe fever. In the face of approaching death he recognizes his errors and sincerely repents. Amel descends from Heaven and cures his sick body. Albana—mortally offended—orders Alfred to be assassinated. But her friend and confidante who is herself in love with Alfred, discovers the plot to him and substitutes another man in his place. Alfred departs secretly. When Albana—filled with remorse—changes her mind and hastens to prevent the murder, she is told that it has at this moment taken place. She stabs herself in a fit of despair. (VIII) Alfred—sailing for Spain—is once more thrown on the coast of North Africa in a tempest raised by Satan. To fortify the hero in his adversities, Amel takes him in a vision first to Heaven, afterwards to the abyss of the damned. On the way the Prince is given an account of Albion's future history. (IX) Advancing into the country the travellers are seized as spies and brought before the governor of Agmat, Albuzar. Owning themselves to be Christians they are ordered to worship the country's idol, the sun, and are condemned to death when they refuse to do so. Guithun—an eminent astronomer, knowing that a total eclipse of the sun will occur at this time—threatens to extinguish their false god. When the eclipse does in fact take place, the people worship the strangers as gods and put the governor to death. The old King of Agmat now receives them with much reverence. On the news of the death of the governor—who had been a great general—the King's country is invaded by the armies of the King of Dara. Alfred is immediately made commander in chief of the Agmatian army and as such he conquers the foreign invaders. He is unanimously called upon to succeed the abdicating King Abal, but he refuses the offer and appoints a worthy hero in his stead from among the native people. (X) Alfred leaves the court of Agmat and travels to Pampelune via Sevilla, Lisbon and Fountarabia. Drought, and disease among the cattle—felt to be a heavenly punishment for some national crime—are at that time plaguing the country of Navarre. Alfred suggests that Silva, the exiled sage, be recalled from Numidia to redress the evil. When, after Silva's arrival, the worthless leaders of the state who had been responsible for his discharge are removed from their high stations, the country is restored to health and plenty. (XI) Alfred crosses the Pyrenees and visits Toulouse and Dijon. An account of the King of Burgundy's avarice and violence is given. At Dijon Alfred is informed of a revolt by the discarded ministers at Pampelune who have joined their forces with the Moorish King of Toledo. Alfred hastens back to Navarre and—placed at the head of the loyal army—conquers Toledo and defeats the enemy. His clemency spares the lives of the traitors. (XII) After the battle Alfred is called upon by a party of Britons who acquaint him with the death of his father and his brother, and entreat him

to assist Ethelred—now on the throne—against the violence of the Danes. The Prince obeys at once. Soon after his arrival in his country Ethelred is killed in a skirmish with the Danes and Alfred is proclaimed king. He attacks the Danish camp in two places, is at first repulsed but eventually gains a magnificent victory. In the royal tent of Gunter the King captures the Queen and the Princess whose lives he graciously spares. Impressed by this act of grace which they attribute to the power of his religion, they become Christians themselves. The Danish court follow their example, and after the ceremony of baptism a treaty of peace is ratified. Alfred asks for, and is granted, the hand of Gunter's beautiful daughter Elsitha. A great king begins his reign.

RICHARD GLOVER: *Leonidas*

A Poem in nine books (pp. 335), London 1737.

Written in blank verse.

(I) The Greek runner Alpheus appears before the Spartan council to rouse the people against the invading forces of Xerxes. At first the Spartans are reluctant to sacrifice themselves for the Greeks and favour a neutral attitude. But at this moment a messenger from Delphi arrives and reveals the oracle according to which Sparta is doomed to perdition, unless a hero of Herculean descent sacrifice his life as the leader of the national resistance. Leonidas—who answers the conditions of the oracle—knows at once that he is called upon to devote his life to this cause. His heroic resolution wins him the allegiance of his people. Taking a tender farewell of his wife and children, he joins the forces and marches towards the Isthmus. Alpheus again calls on the king and enumerates the peoples engaged in their cause. The worthless, unpatriotic Thebans alone hesitate to throw in their lot with that of doomed Leonidas, and out of fear only send 400 men under the wily Anaxander. (II) After an inspired harangue by their leader, the troops march off to take up their defensive positions. At the sight of Thermopylae the king breaks forth into praise of liberty and inspires his men with martial fervour. Anaxander, the cowardly Theban—supported by the traitor Epialtes—praises Leonidas, but at the same time draws his attention to the numberless host of the approaching Persians in order to intimidate him. But when two ambassadors of the Persian despot come to ask submission of the Greeks and Spartans he sends them back proudly and indignantly. They express mock-regret at the small group of doomed heroes. Anaxander is displeased but Epialtes consoles him with a plan to desert the ranks of the Spartans. (III) Xerxes—incredulous of such bold defiance—resolves to ascertain the truth of this report. He drives through the huge camp of his army out to the Spartan advanced posts, reflecting for a while on the transitoriness of his power. A catalogue describes the peoples and their armament.

The king's companion—the Spartan Demaratus, unjustly exiled from his country—tells him that the Spartans never surrender and points out the differences between the Persian soldiery and the Spartan militia. At the sight of the defenders of Thermopylae preparing for the battle, Demaratus bursts into tears with home-sickness. Xerxes orders these Spartans to be brought before him in fetters on the following day. (IV) The battle commences and is described in detail. The two haughty messengers of the previous day are killed. The Persians are put to flight but rallied by the noble Hyperanthes; the issue remains undecided. The old Demophilus, over the corpse of a valiant enemy, laments such valour wasted in the service of the wrong cause. (V) The armies—having been regrouped—engage in renewed war. The fate of the young philosopher Teribazus who is secretly in love with Ariana, sister of Xerxes, is recounted. Despairing of ever winning the beloved woman he plunges into battle, devoid of hope, and is slain in a valiant combat in which hate has no part. A violent counter-attack is launched by the Persians to force the Spartan positions. A long list of the fallen conveys an idea of the cruel slaughter. This moment is chosen by some of Anaxander's troops to desert the Spartan lines. The Persians—losing confidence in single combat—try to crush the Spartans with a massive onset. Leonidas feigns a retreat, and when the pursuing hordes of the enemy have choked the narrow pass with their numbers, an avalanche of rocks and trees is released from the heights above, carrying panic and death amongst the Persians. (VI) During the night the Spartan king is approached by the beautiful Ariana, who has furtively left the Persian camp in order to recover the dead body of Teribazus whom she had loved without his knowing it. Great Leonidas grants her wish, but over the corpse Ariana is overcome by grief and stabs herself. Meanwhile her companion is discovered to be Polydorus, the long-lost brother of Alpheus. He gives an account before the chiefs of how he had been captured in his youth by pirates and sold to Ariana as a slave. He reports that on their way to the Spartan camp he had been stopped by Demaratus, the exile, who had asked him to inform Leonidas of an act of treason about to be committed by Epialtes, whereby the Spartan camp was to be invaded at various unguarded points. At the sight of the Spartans glowing with rage over this treacherous plan, Polydorus recalls his own warlike youth and laments his life wasted in servitude. When the lifeless Ariana is discovered, two prisoners are released and ordered to carry the bodies of the unhappy lovers back to the Persian camp. (VII) The recent defeats and the death of his sister leave Xerxes in a black mood. Argestes offers to win Leonidas over by means of bribery; he seeks out the Spartan king and tries to dazzle his mind with promises of wealth and dominion. But the Spartans' patriotic enthusiasm at the news that the traitor Epialtes is leading the Persians towards some secret, unguarded point of access to

the straits, is an unmistakable answer to the mean endeavours of Argestes; he quits the camp in horror. Meanwhile the Persian armies have taken up a new position in the plain. To prevent their attack on the following day, Leonidas orders his men to invade their camp during the night. He knows that the Spartan victory and his own end are near and soliloquizes on the bliss of dying for virtue and liberty. (VIII) Megistias interprets a dream of Leonidas as the certain triumph of his cause. Offerings are made to the Gods, whereupon the army marches towards the Persian camp. (IX) The camp is attacked with fire and sword; destruction and panic reign supreme among the enemy. In the morning Hyperanthes pursues the retreating Spartans with fresh troops and first kills Anaxander and his troop of infamous Thebans who have come to join the Persian forces. At the straits of Thermopylae the last stand is made by the Spartans. Numberless Persians are slain; various catalogues of the fallen heroes tell of the fierce battle. The enemy is beaten and thrown back, although in the superhuman struggle the few Spartans are at last overcome; Leonidas himself is treacherously wounded and expires. Thus the hero has fulfilled the oracle and the sacred cause of freedom.

Note: The fifth edition of *Leonidas*, which appeared in 1770, in two volumes, was extended to twelve books. The poem contains the original nine books in their entirety and practically unaltered in their text. The terseness of some of the episodes of the first edition induced the poet to describe them at greater length. In addition to that, the element of the marvellous is more liberally introduced.

WILLIAM WILKIE: *The Epigoniad*

An epic poem in ten books (pp. 215), Edinburgh 1757.

Written in heroic couplets.

(I) An oracle wills that the corrupt city of Thebes is to fall by the hands of the Greek hero Diomedes. The execution of this just cause is, however, complicated by the circumstance that Diomedes is loath to leave his beloved Cassandra who is being wooed by the dangerous tyrant Echetus. Venus—protectress of Thebes—trying to avert the city's doom, resolves to keep the hero away from its walls by raising his jealousy to such a degree as to make him quit the army and hasten home to Cassandra. The nymph Zelo-typé is commissioned to execute this design. She appears before Diomedes—as he thinks in a dream—and tells him that Cassandra is sorely tempted to yield to the entreaties of the tyrant Echetus. Diomedes decides to stir up discord in the army and to cover up his own departure with that of the mutinous troops. In a council he dissuades the chiefs from carrying on the siege because—so he says—his troops, weakened by disease, are refusing to take part in the assault. Indignation and astonishment surge up amongst

the chiefs. Diomedes is overruled and preparations for the attack are made. He is obliged to accept their decision. (II) The first battle with the Thebans is fought and described in the traditional manner, attacks and retreats duly alternating. (III) Diomedes—for the time being—puts aside his sorrows. During the heroic fight his charioteer has been killed. A youthful warrior—in reality none other than Cassandra whom love has driven to follow her hero to the field—offers his services, but Diomedes does not recognize her and accepts the help of Pallas instead who has descended from above to assist him. When the war is renewed his appearance causes the army to achieve miraculous acts of heroism. Pallas—in order to rout the Thebans still more—presents him with magic armour which renders him invulnerable, but Jove—fearing that the fall of Thebes will take place before the time allotted by fate—commissions Hermes to divest the hero of his armour when asleep. (IV) The war has brought sorrow to many a Theban house. Creon himself, the king, mourns the loss of one of his sons slain in battle by Diomedes, and gives way to his boundless paternal grief. In order to perform proper funeral rites he sends two messengers to the Greek camp to negotiate a seven days' truce. One of them, Clytophon, is recognized by some of the Greeks as a well-known friend of former days, and they gladly encourage him to tell the assembled chiefs about his prodigious adventures. Clytophon relates how he was kidnapped by pirates when he was ten years old and how they were thrown on the island of the Cyclops. The pirates were devoured by these giants, but he himself managed to elude them for full ten years. One day he discovered a little boat with which he tried to escape from the island. None the less, a Cyclop spotted the fugitive and started wading after him, but Poseidon misdirected the giant by means of a phantom-ship and thus snatched Clytophon from certain death. It was this voyage that had led him to the hospitable roofs of the Greeks.—After the narration the truce is once more talked about. Diomedes counsels against it and favours a speedy conclusion of the war. Again he is overruled. (V) Funeral rites and games are held on both sides. A hilarious incident relieves the martial mood when the spiteful Thersites—laughing at a bad swimmer—falls into the river together with the branch of the tree on which he is sitting. Diomedes meanwhile sits in his tent sulking. He finally decides to continue the war since, after all, he has not agreed to the truce. Heaven resolves to prevent this ignoble deed and prompts his virtuous friend Deiphobos to dissuade him from this undertaking. When Deiphobos succeeds in winning over his friend's troops, Diomedes kills him in a fit of uncontrolled rage. Odysseus manages with difficulty to appease the angry soldiers. (VI) Immediate remorse seizes the unhappy hero after his rash deed. In this moment of despondency Cassandra approaches him to bring him a drink of water and to console him. But now Diomedes recognizes her

and curses her as the cause of all his troubles. She turns away in speechless sorrow. Zelotypé advises her to go back to her country, but on the way she is captured by a group of Thebans. As she is wearing the armour of a slain Theban noble, they decide to put her to death. But when they find out who she is, they lead her into the town as a hostage. Diomedes in the meantime is again tortured by remorse at his rashness; he curses his own existence which seems to bring misery to all his friends. When Creon threatens to kill the maid if Diomedes should renew the war, the enraged hero is compelled to concede a truce of twenty days, at the end of which Cassandra is to be released unharmed. (VII) At the same time Creon sends his second son Cleon to ask Hercules for assistance against the Greeks. Cleon and his friend set out to find the mighty hero but are only in time to learn from Philoctetes the news and the manner of his recent death. The Thebans steal the divine bow and arrows of Hercules, but on their flight they are overtaken by a storm and cast back on the same island. Cleon is killed by the enraged Philoctetes and his companion returns only to announce the failure of their mission. (VIII) Deserted, as it appears, by the Gods, Creon decides to precipitate the outcome of the war by breaking the seven days' truce with the Greeks. Diomedes and his warriors keep away from the battlefield when the war begins again; fear for Cassandra's life prompts them to observe their own twenty day's truce with Creon. But when the desperate onsets of the Thebans carry the enemy into the Greek camp, Odysseus—incited by Pallas—calls Diomedes a coward and convinces him that there is little hope to regain Cassandra in twenty days, if the Greeks should be defeated. Heedless of all consequences Diomedes plunges into the thick of the battle. The Thebans are thrown back into their city. (IX) The inevitable happens. Cassandra—superbly contemptuous of death—is murdered in the palace by a hired assassin, and her head is waved over the walls on a spear. Diomedes assaults the walls, ineffectively supported by Odysseus and his troops. Turning round he catches sight of Odysseus himself and at once bursts forth into curses on him as the man who is responsible for the breach of the truce and the subsequent death of Cassandra. He attacks the Ithacan and is only prevented from killing him by the intercession of Pallas. He apologizes and makes peace with Odysseus. A renewed effort is made to negotiate the walls and the town is eventually conquered.

JAMES OGDEN: *The Revolution*

An Epic Poem in Twelve Books (pp. 251), London 1790.

Written in heroic couplets.

(I) The Prince of Orange is hailed as the champion of the cause of freedom against King James and the French who with their intrigues aid and abet James's black designs. The angelical hierarchy set over human affairs looks

kindly on the Prince's endeavours. Japhetiel—Hierarch of Europe—, cognizant of momentous affairs to take place, orders the protecting angel of Britain and his angelic guard to desert the court of James, and to attend the patriotic peers who have gathered to decide about the country's future. Evil spirits replace the heavenly ministers at court. The peers—after a long discussion concerning constitutional problems—agree to invite the Prince of Orange to take over the helm of state. The evil spirits unintentionally support this plan by driving James to arbitrary measures such as cancelling charters, breaking laws, dismissing Fellows of Colleges. These acts only serve to hasten the King's ruin. (II) William of Orange reflects and soliloquizes upon the hazardous undertaking, not yet sure of his part in the impending drama. In order to guide the wavering Prince, William I. rises from the dead and appears before him. He gives him an account of the bliss in Paradise that awaits the virtuous and the brave, and foretells his advancement to the English throne. In order to prepare him for this high task, the Conqueror entertains the Prince with instructions concerning civil and ecclesiastical government and advises him about various problems which will arise during his kingship. (III) A conference follows between William and his ministers in which we get insight into the manner in which he has prepared the expedition, how he has managed to conceal these preparations, how he has won the favour of the princes in allegiance with him and ensured a friendly reception in England. In another conference between the admirals Herbert and Russel—who are occasionally received by the Prince to report on affairs in England—and Henry Sidney, William is given by the latter an account of party politics in Britain since the time of Queen Elizabeth, and characterizations of the successive reigns up to that of James II. Admiral Herbert tells of mutiny in the fleet after mass had been held there, and expresses his conviction that William will be kindly received by the navy. (IV) The high guests are shown round the Hague and the Prince's palace. In a portrait gallery he describes the lives and deeds of his royal ancestors. King James is informed of the imminent invasion; in sudden panic—but too late—he tries to mend the situation by making some concessions to the people. Ombruliel—the intriguing spirit of France—suggests to King Louis a scheme of invading England under the pretence of assisting King James. But Louis—afraid to leave his frontiers unguarded against Orange—rejects the plan. William launches his fleet, but Superstition—through incantations and spells—raises a storm in which the ships are scattered. William's prayer at last causes the tempest to subside. (V) Superstition and James mutually ascribe the welcome disaster to their respective pious intercessions. In his wanton pride the King again pursues harsh and bloody measures. But Japhetiel charges the angels to keep the winds imprisoned, and William's fleet sets sail for the English coast once more. The Prince's standard and

scarf are described, on which his former heroic actions are embroidered. The English admiral comes aboard the Prince's ship and relates the pernicious trial and execution of the heroic Lord Russel. (VI) In the morning the fleet fills the straits off Dover. In a council the Prince decides to make a landing with the van. Previous to this venture, a great parade is held with salutes and military music. He then lands at Torbay with 2000 horse. The expectations and apprehensions of the peasants are mentioned; an old farmer relates some occurrences of the Civil War, Cromwell's conquest in the West and Monmouth's rising there. The Prince pitches his camp, sets up his standard and harangues his army. Fame personified spreads his declaration. (VII) The courtiers are seized with consternation and desert the King. James tries to devolve the responsibility on the bishops by asking them to sign a paper directed against William of Orange and his cause. They refuse and advise him to call a parliament, but he still relies on the loyalty of his standing army. William—mortified at the slow progress in establishing contact with the rebels—is about to reembark with his van when some detachments of horse which have deserted from the royal army arrive at the camp. James, speeding to his army, finds everything in disorder there. He returns to London disheartened. (VIII) The isolation of the King progresses rapidly; the falling-off of his own daughter Anne, and the just reproaches for the murder of Lord Russel strike distraction to his very soul. In the city he and Jeffreys fall into the hands of the excited mob. Whereas the King is eventually released by the gentry, Jeffreys is thrown in the Tower where he dies of fear and wounds. James seeks refuge at the court of France; William and Mary are acknowledged King and Queen. In order to retrieve the lost cause, Ombruliel advises King Louis to assist James in the invasion of Ireland, where he may yet gain a stronghold for further undertakings. James lands there with a French army. (IX) The courage and patriotism of the Ulster colony are extolled in a description of the siege of Londonderry and the heroic sallies of its garrison under Walker. The French and Irish blame one another for their failure to capture the town. James blames both sides and withdraws to Dublin, leaving the command in the hands of the French general De Rosen. The city is temporarily relieved by an attack of the Inniskillingers. Having cannonaded it ineffectually the French lay a strong boom across the inlet of the harbour to stop supplies from offshore. (X) According to a plan contrived in hell the French drive a number of poor people under the walls of Derry to let them starve to death. The hell of Famine is described where the instigators of such crimes are doomed to suffer endless agonies. The people under the walls exhort the garrison to hold out. The defenders erect gallows on the parapet and hang their French prisoners by way of reprisal. The starving people under the wall are at last released on the protest of the bishop of Meath. When the

famine within the city threatens to overcome the garrison, a victual ship is sighted off the Lough. It risks the danger of running against the boom and succeeds in breaking it; the city is saved. The Inniskilling men gain a great victory on the same day and the siege is raised. (XI) Early in the spring King William—having settled various complicated government matters—joins his army in Ireland, where it has undergone much hardship during the winter. On the King's approach, James crosses the river Boyne to force a decision. William—venturing near the French camp—is wounded by the contrivance of Ombruliel. He rides through the camp to reassure his soldiers. Whilst resting in his tent, the Conqueror appears to him once more to confirm his final success and the quick rise of England as the arbitress of Europe. The King calls a council and gives his orders for the attack of the following morning. He rides about in the camp by torchlight, surveying the preparations and encouraging his men. (XII) The battle of the Boyne commences. Young Schomburg breaks the Irish right and left flanks. Duke Schomburg in the centre fords the Boyne with his Dutch Guards, French refugees, Inniskilling horse and Danes, but is repelled. The Duke is accidentally killed in the skirmish by his own soldiers. The gallant defender of Derry, Walker, falls at the same instant. The King charges to support the centre. Once more Ombruliel contrives to endanger William's life, but Terzilliel interposes in time to protect him. The King performs great exploits of valour and gains the day. James in despair quits the field, flies to Waterford and embarks for France. The road to Britain's new greatness is cleared.

JOHN OGILVIE: *Britannia*

A National Epic Poem in Twenty Books (pp. 623), Edinburgh, Aberdeen 1801.

Written in blank verse.

(I) Britannia, Guardian Power of the British Isle, is awaiting the fleet of the Trojan Brutus who—directed by Diana—has set out to found a new empire after the fall of Troy. Sacrificing to Jupiter (although it is in fact the True God who receives his prayers), Brutus asks for a sign whether the cliffs ahead of him be the destined land. Versed in augury he reads the flight of an eagle as a confirmation thereof and as a promise of success after much hardship. They cast anchor and go ashore; a catalogue of heroes and peoples follows. The Guardian Power appears before the chiefs in the disguise of a shepherd and warns them of a ferocious tribe of giants, the Gerontes, who inhabit the isle. After admonishing the leaders, the shepherd vanishes in the air. Brutus talks to his people of the heavenly messenger and orders the ships to be destroyed. (II) Azrael—battered and discomfited—rejoins Satan and his compeers in hell after unsuccessful attempts to hinder Brutus from reaching the destined land. Before the hellish council he relates his adven-

tures: Brutus set sail from Troy to obey Diana's decree. He, Azrael, caused the Demons of the Earth to raise a terrifying storm, but eventually they were routed and driven away by a band of angels under Uzziel. Changing his tactics Azrael then wafted the fleet to the Cyclades where the missioned people was to be corrupted by the notorious lasciviousness of the inhabitants. (III) Brutus mistrusted their friendliness, but his people—tired of hardship—gladly believed the high priest who told them that Venus had forbidden them to leave the island, and sank into utter sloth. Only Brutus and his old friend Evander abstained, still hearkening to the voice of God. Uzziel then appeared before the hero and ordered him to rouse the people to depart. He talked to his chiefs in council, but found little support, and the mob, too, was incited against him and his cause. Only a small group of warriors remained with him when the rabble had finally withdrawn. (IV) Uzziel mounted up to Heaven in disgust; he, Azrael, followed him exultantly but could not help breaking into sobs at the sight of his former home. Heaven ordered the Angel of Pestilence to visit the disloyal host. The chastisement brought about the people's repentance. Sacrifices were offered up to Jupiter, who directed them to Sicily. Azrael tried to prevent their departure but was wounded and defeated by Uzziel's sword. Now the fleet has reached the Island.—Satan acquits his minister and sends him to the British Isle to induce Gerontes, the chief of the giants, to make a last stand against the delegated King. (V) Brutus, meanwhile, has ordered two of his heroes to explore the countryside beyond their beachhead with strict injunctions to seek the giants' friendship rather than their enmity. The brute Gerontes—warned by Azrael—wants to attack the invaders at once, but sly Vortiger advises him to capture them in order to learn their intentions. The two scouts discover a castle of the giants and convince themselves of their hostile attitude. On the way back to the camp they clash with a party of these huge warriors and kill one of them. Amazed at the sight of Brutus's vast army the giants desist from pursuing the Trojans and return to their castle. (VI) Confusion reigns in their council. Some want to attack in the night, others on the following morning. At this moment Azrael—disguised as a hermit—approaches the chiefs and heralds the approach of Androgeus and his Albians who have come to help the giants against the foreign invaders. Nevertheless, impatient Romerus—their noblest warrior—inveigles them into attacking without awaiting the arrival of the ally. The battle is described in the traditional manner. Locrinus, son of Brutus, stands out as the most illustrious Trojan hero. Gerontes and his men are put to flight. (VII) Androgeus arrives with his Albians. The chief's secret intention is to seek the friendship of the Trojans against the insolent giants. But before he can establish contact with Brutus, Gerontes rushes in to renew the war, dragging the Albians with him. Androgeus spares the life of a young Trojan

warrior. The issue becoming unfavourable to the conquerors, Brutus himself plunges from his raised vantage point into the battle, preceded by the radiant form of Britannia who is vainly opposed by hellish Moloch. (VIII) The hero strikes terror to the hearts of the enemy. Suddenly he is confronted by Androgeus who—still intent on winning his friendship—upbraids him for bringing war to a peaceful country. Hardly has Brutus started telling the chief about his divine cause, when Androgeus is attacked by another warrior; Brutus himself is called to another quarter of the battle, where Romerus is creating havoc amongst the Trojans. Together with Locrinus he forces the giants to retreat into the woods. Azrael protects them in a veil of fog. (IX) A divine bard admonishes the chosen people to persevere, and prophesies a great victory. Whilst in hell everybody is blaming everybody else for their continued defeats, Satan himself sets to work and locks Pestilence into a cave near the battlefield to be let loose when extremity should require it. Azrael appears in a council of the giants and Albians and incites them to renew the war. Androgeus threatens to withdraw if by the end of another day the victory is not won. (X) In the Trojan council a new strategy is conceived. Part of the army is to engage the enemy in combat whilst a strong force is to lie in ambush in the woods, ready to fall upon the enemy when most exhausted from the fight. Propitious thunder again predicts success. Locrinus wins fresh laurels in the battle. To distract the dangerous hero from his duties, Azrael—disguised as a friend—approaches him and asks for permission to convey his beloved Almeria to a safer place, as the camp is in danger of being stormed by the giants. Locrinus consents and Almeria is led off by the evil spirit. Invincible Brutus stops the raging Romerus who is driven on by Satan; God himself puts the Apostate to flight. (XI) Meanwhile, Almeria—led by Azrael into the wilderness—begins to entertain suspicions of her guide, and, indeed, when night has descended, Azrael deserts the helpless maid, leaving her a pray to the wild beasts of the forest; she swoons with fright. In the morning, however, she is awakened by the notes of a flute and guided by an angel to the hut of a hermit where she is received with kindness. (XII) A series of unlucky coincidences still prevent the Albions from showing proofs of their friendly intentions. The giant forces have been reinforced by the Amazon troops of Leontia, daughter of Gerontes. They destroy the effeminate Lydians and launch an attack on the camp. But there Leontia is killed by its fierce defender, Camber. (XIII) More despair is heaped upon the giants when the son of Romerus is killed soon afterwards. When Locrinus—supported by Britannia—is about to deal the decisive blow against the giants, a messenger from God interposes and tells the guardian angel that the end has not come yet. Britannia withdraws her protecting hand in obedience. Azrael jumps at the opportunity and instructs Romerus how to bring about the ruin of

the Trojans. He then singles out Locrinus and tells him about Almeria's fate. The terrified hero chases the devil to extort more news from him, but he, too, is led astray in the depths of the forest. (XIV) A group of warriors—sent after him by Brutus—capture several of the Albians. They release them as a proof of their friendly intentions, and one of them gives an account of the origin, the customs and the religion of his people. (XV) When the war flares up again in the morning, the fighting spirit of the Trojans is low because of Locrinus's absence. They are repulsed everywhere; a catalogue of the fallen records their losses. The triumph of Satan seems near, but suddenly the battle is suspended when Brutus and Androgeus find themselves face to face once more. Satan envelops the plain in darkness to prevent a reconciliation between the two and then releases Pestilence from her cave, setting her down amidst the Trojan army. The soldiers take to their heels in panic. It is at this moment that Britannia is again given free hand to deal with her infernal opponents; she drives the fiend back to hell and mocks the cowardice of the Trojans. From the woods the detachment that has been lying in ambush now pours from its cover and restores the balance between the belligerents. (XVI) Locrinus, in the meantime, has been guided by an angel to a temple of the Druids where to his great joy he finds his beloved Almeria. A vision of Britain's future history and cultural achievements is revealed to the hero by the chief Druid, from the Roman occupation (XVII) up to the victory of Aboukir. (XVIII) Androgeus—impatient of bringing about a reconciliation with Brutus—suggests a four days' truce. Vortiger seconds him with the intent of falling upon the unsuspecting Trojans. Two days have elapsed when Satan and Belial—fretting about the delay—kindle the rage of Gerontes and Romerus by reminding them of their dead children. They put the willing Vortiger upon the foul scheme of killing some Albians at night with captured Trojan swords, which they would leave behind, thus inciting the Albians to immediate revenge on the Trojans. The Albians are duly deceived and send a messenger to the astonished Brutus to cancel the truce. The giants—who can now put the blame for the breach of the peace on their allies—prepare for the attack. But Camber recognizes one of the swords with which the outrage had been committed as having been captured by the giants, and thus the deceit is discovered. Amongst the indignant Trojans now steps Locrinus, safely returned from the woods. (XIX) They take the field with renewed enthusiasm. The Alban messenger returns to Androgeus and discloses to him the truth about the nightly massacre. The war between the two peoples ceases at long last. Their united forces turn against the giants. Satan is too late shrouding their king in mist. Locrinus kills him, and his warriors withdraw into their castle. (XX) The Trojans and Albians follow them and urge them to accept peace, but proud Romerus declines the offer. Before the castle is assaulted,

the celestial and infernal powers clash in a last decisive battle. Rolling thunder accompanies the final defeat of Satan and his peers. Afterwards the castle is attacked and taken. Vortiger is killed; Romerus—their best man—fights the army of Brutus single-handed but is at last overcome and slain. Brutus may now begin to build up his new empire.

GEORGE COCKINGS: *War*

A poem in six books, London 1781.

Written in heroic couplets.

Cockings's poem is not conceived as a formal epic poem, but as a historical record of the American war. We mention the work because it is in fact only a more extreme example of what all the other poems dealing with modern history are: Impersonal accounts of collective heroism or disaster. The author's synopsis of Book II will sufficiently illustrate the character of the poem:

(II) Description of the expedition against Canada by Montgomery, Wooster, Arnold, etc. Their march through the woods; the forts Chamblee and St. John's with Montreal taken. Provision vessels are intercepted on the river. The Provincials march to Quebec, besiege and attack the fort. General Carleton's gallant defence. The garrison is stormed, Arnold wounded and retreating. Generals Montgomery, Macpherson, etc. are killed and the Provincials are driven back with the loss of about 700. The siege and blockade continued, Lord Dunmore's transactions in Virginia; his attack at the great bridge, near Norfolk, and his repulse. The death of Captain Fordyce. Norfolk attacked and burnt by the British and Provincials. Lord Dunmore's retreat with the warships to Gwin's Island; he is driven off by the Provincials, suffers in a storm, and sails for New York. Lord Petersham arrives at Quebec with 200 men; a sally is made, the Provincials retreat. Reinforcements arrive from the congress, and the Generals Burgoyne, Fraser, Reidesel, Philips, etc. from England with about 7000. The Provincials retreat to Sorel's Bank; Cedar's Fort is taken. The battle at Trois Rivieres. Montreal and Fort Chamblee are retaken, St. John's burnt. All Canada evacuated; all the Provincials retreat across Lake Champlain. Generals Carleton, Burgoyne, Captain Douglas, etc. prepare to follow them. The engagement on the lake and total defeat of the Provincial fleet.

2. THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE CAUSES AND THEIR HEROES

The poets, usually combining the offices of creative authors and critics of the epic, generally confirmed with their practice what we have called the most typical feature of neoclassical epic poetry: the supreme importance of

some cause, political or religious, or both. It is usually this cause which appears in the 'invocation' or 'argument' of an epic, and which, through the hero, is extolled and praised as the very soul of the poem. Its triumph and fulfilment form the consummation of the action and render it 'fortunate' even if the hero's own fate should be an unhappy one.

Thus the subject of *Prince Arthur* is not in the first place the hero himself, but his mission, which is the defeat of the Saxons, the heathen oppressors of Britain, and the establishment of a great Christian kingdom. It is this ultimate goal in reference to which every single action has to be contemplated by Arthur at the cost of his own concerns, the more so as he is constantly aware of his responsibility and of his isolated position. "Conscious should he his glorious End acquire", such is Blackmore's high claim on behalf of his hero, and he therefore makes Raphael descend from Heaven to inform Arthur beyond any doubt of the divine cause, of the hero's function in it and of his final triumph and kingship. It is from this certain knowledge, from this charm, or spell, of being "arm'd in thy [Heaven's] Cause²" that the hero is able to draw ever fresh fuel for his unflinching stoicism, a fortitude of mind which allows him, even in moments of extreme outward affliction, to find reassurance in the improbability that "Heav'n's Revenge should Heav'n's own Cause pursue³". And it is again this identification with the will of Heaven, this knowledge of being anointed, this unerring steadfastness of purpose which reveals Arthur's character to the eyes of the world as that of a saint. People know instinctively of his being

by Heav'n design'd,
A great Deliv'rer of oppress'd Mankind⁴.

or they "bless him as a Saviour sent⁵".

This character of Messiah which is forced upon the hero by the cause, is maintained in Blackmore's second epic. *King Arthur* as a sequel to *Prince Arthur* is possible because it is a new story, a new cause, in the service of which Arthur is to act; "'tis the Diversity of the Action, and not of the Hero, that diversifies the Poem⁶" the poet argues in the preface, and it is for this reason that he can overlook the drawback that results from his having to reintroduce the same unaltered and unalterable character as the leading figure of his poem. (It is the very same attitude that enabled Glover to justify a sequel to his *Leonidas*, although Leonidas himself is dead; the *Atheneid* simply continues what is more important than any individual man: the story of the Greek cause of freedom.) In *King Arthur*, then, we are supposed to concentrate on the cause, which is not conceived and executed by the hero's own initiative, but by God himself. God is the supreme hero of the neoclassical epic. It is only when the task has been set, in this case the protection of the Gallic Christians from pagan tyranny and the establishment

of Christian hegemony in Europe, that Arthur is called upon by Heaven to implement it as its tool. His position is hereby again clearly and consciously defined with regard both to himself and his fellow men. He knows, and is generally known, to be acting on "Heav'n's Command"⁷, to be "anointed, Tyrants to destroy and proud Oppressors"⁸, his subjects are inspired with the firm belief that "this great Deliv'rer shall Europe save"⁹. His greatness, obviously, is not circumscribed in terms of monumental personal glory or disaster; he is the selfless executor of God's decrees. He is nothing to himself, everything to the others. In contrast to the authentic epic warriors, the neoclassical "Heros are Blessings on the World bestow'd"¹⁰.

Glover's *Leonidas* entirely conforms to this pattern. It is again a cause conceived by higher powers which asks for a hero who is prepared to sacrifice for it his own desires and ambitions. It is the cause of freedom against the tyranny of Xerxes and his invading armies. Leonidas deliberately, consciously and exclusively devotes his life to it in the knowledge of being chosen by Heaven. This is the argument with which he can dismiss from him all private cares. There is no real agony or conflict arising from uncertainty; the plans are made and known to him. His answer to the oracle is: "My heart exulting answers to thy call"¹¹. Whatever he does henceforth is only done with a view to his mission, and his people speak of him as "Thou, whom the Gods have chosen to exalt above mankind"¹²; they "extoll and hail him as their guardian God"¹³.

Ogilvie was more true to the neoclassical spirit when he removed the name of his hero from the title and replaced it by the symbol of the cause: Britannia. For the task of founding a new empire, of initiating the long and glorious history of British rule, Heaven selects as its tool the Trojan Brutus, a man who in unflinching virtue and singleness of purpose devotes his full energy to the execution of this heavenly order. For him, too, there is no time to indulge in personal interests and personal glory. He is conceived as a man with whom "no thirst of fame impell'd One act"¹⁴, "still in his people's good he found his own"¹⁵, for them he is prepared "to conquer and reform, To rule and civilise"¹⁶. Like Arthur and Leonidas (particularly in the revised fifth edition) he is constantly fortified and urged on in his actions by ever recurring signs from Heaven which herald his final triumph. Like Blackmore, Ogilvie denounces any aberration from the chosen path as sacrilege, certain to be attended by severe punishment and divine displeasure; whenever the warriors, fatigued by excessive toil, give way to thoughts of leisure, and thereby injure the common cause, Heaven withdraws its protecting hand, leaving them a prey to misery and despair. The neoclassical epic God is an impatient God of instant justice.

If we recognize the hero's being anointed by Heaven as his most characteristic trait, we understand that this new type of heroism need not ne-

cessarily be associated with heroic deeds on the battlefield. The decisive factor is much rather that the hero be capable of inspiring that enthusiasm which is necessary for the successful completion of the cause. The apparent advantage of this conception was tempting and unique. It was the conception which enabled Blackmore firstly, to disregard or break down the barrier that had up to now excluded modern history from the legitimate epic, and, secondly, to make a woman, Queen Elizabeth, the heroine of his third epic. She does not, in Blackmore's opinion, forfeit the status of heroine just because she never appears in heroic action. If her admirals and generals are instrumental to the actual achievement of military success, it is nevertheless she who—quite apart from her hierarchical eminence—is raised above them to the status of true heroine by virtue of being personally commissioned by God to champion "reform'd Religion's Glorious Cause¹⁷", to liberate the Netherlands from the Spaniards and to save England by destroying the Armada. In her, the cause finds its personification on earth and adorns her with the saintly air which is requisite for the true eighteenth-century hero. The high intellectual and spiritual qualities which, even in the epics dealing with heroes of the obscure past, are in reality those of the eighteenth century, are here depicted in a character more directly belonging to the age in which the poet himself lived. The cause again eliminates character as a problem in itself; it is Blackmore's pride to be able to speak of her as

*The pious Queen, who more Concern had shown
For Albion's Ease and Honour, than her own*¹⁸.

For Ogden, too, the natural stress on the ideal cause and on the hero's religious and political character, facilitated the task of representing contemporary history, which would have been doubtful, had the leading character been a mere warrior. It is only in the last book of *The Revolution* that William of Orange appears on the battlefield. What makes him a hero is again the fact that he is chosen by God to execute Heaven's own cause: the liberation of the British People from the tyranny of James II, the promotion of Protestantism in England and the establishment of a new, glorious kingdom. It is only in relation to this cause that the worthiness of the hero's actions and feelings is ultimately defined. In sacrificing for it his own personality he relinquishes the sphere of ordinary beings and assumes the conscious worth of a saint. "Thee glorious! thee Deliv'rer men shall hail¹⁹", such is the prophecy with which the Prince is, from the very beginning, directed on his course by the heavenly vision.

Compared with these 'regular' epics, Blackmore's *Alfred* represents a kind of variation of the usual neoclassical pattern, a variation which at first sight shows promise of more personal interest and drama in the hero's character. Alfred is not seen directly acting in a cause which is the immediate and

exclusive subject of the poem. He is described by Blackmore as growing up to be a hero fit to enter into the service of a cause in due time. He is supposed to be a hero in the making; he is supposed, one day, to be like Arthur, or William, or Brutus, and for this reason he sets out to explore

*In various Realms the Customs, Arts and Laws
Which Pow'r extend, and Peace and Plenty cause*²⁰.

Whoever asks him for the motives of his wanderings receives such an answer and an allusion to the distant cause, which is to

*retrieve the Isle [Britain] degen'rate grown,
Teach her how Pow'r and Plenty to encrease,
And make her great in Arms, yet fond of Peace*²¹.

He modestly hopes that through his experiences he may

*humble and indulgent grow,
Patient in Suff'ring, and resign'd in Woe*²².

Unfortunately Blackmore did not make use of the possibilities that were provided by his theme. True to the neoclassical spirit Alfred is from the outset conscious of being delegated by Heaven to fulfill the distant cause—the cause dominates his life (and therefore the poem) as though he were already acting in it. His Odyssey is in fact part of the cause; there is not the agony of being prevented from executing it as in the case of Ulysses's wanderings, and the Gods are not his enemies. Alfred's task is supposed to be impracticable without the deliberately chosen experiences of his journey. But since Blackmore jeopardizes the dramatic possibilities of a character in the process of being formed, Alfred appears as a man who can be taught nothing more. He does not learn through failure; he is already humble, indulgent, patient in suffering, resigned in woe, he is already an invincible warrior. Wherever he goes, he is the one who teaches, rather than the one who is being taught. His experiences only add to the stock of his rational knowledge, but they do not affect his character, which is from the outset chosen by Heaven to serve the cause on the very condition of its being blameless and mature. Alfred's wanderings are an Odyssey 'improved' and fashioned to conform to neoclassical belief.

The most interesting and the most significant specimen in the series of cause-epics is undoubtedly Wilkie's *Epigoniad*. Wilkie is the only author who reverts to the Homeric type of imperfect character; his poem is clearly an attempt at recreating a more 'regular', modern *Iliad*. The most telling amendment to Homer's plan is an increased emphasis on the cause. It immediately marks him down as a classicist. In the *Epigoniad* it is no longer the hero's anger which is the sole object of the poem, in which case it would have

been sufficient to select an appropriately limited space of time from the long story of the cause; it is much rather the story of the cause from beginning to end which is the professed subject of the poem. Diomedes is destined to besiege and sack the city of Thebes which is "for perfidy to fall, and oaths profan'd²³", and to destroy its tyrant king. It is the typical eighteenth-century cause and infinitely more important and noble than the sack of Troy for a beautiful woman's sake. The punishment of the corrupt town is the hero's supreme mission, and it is only with the completion of this task that the poem comes to its logical conclusion (a conception which is expressly denounced by Aristotle in his criticism of the *Heraclid*, and *Theseid*). The character of deliverer, thoroughly in keeping with contemporary epic theory, is with much concern imposed on the hero. Wilkie's neoclassicism in this respect becomes also apparent in his criticism of *Paradise Lost*. He calls Milton's poem irregular first and foremost on account of the absence in it of a cause, of a 'fortunate' action in the neoclassical sense of the word. He blames the heroes for not being instrumental to the accomplishment of such a cause and for their being tragic in consequence of this. The *Epigoniad*, in Wilkie's opinion, is 'fortunate', because its proposed end, the fall of Thebes, is eventually brought about.

We need only look at the story of the *Epigoniad* to see that such a qualification could only be made by a critical mind which naturally assumes that poetical perfection rests on the unity of the cause, and not on the unity of the hero's character. In reality, the subject of the *Epigoniad* is not the fall of Thebes, and the poem is as 'irregular' and tragic as *Paradise Lost* if judged from the hero's point of view. Perhaps we may also say that, although Wilkie was too deeply indebted to the neoclassical school to disregard its opinions, his genius led him to introduce 'irregularities' concealed under a regular appearance. But his attempt to reconcile dramatic character with the requirements of a neoclassical cause-hero is a plain failure; although the cause is there, it has as little inner meaning for the hero as it has, for instance, for Achilles in the case of the *Iliad*. The identity of cause and hero is dissolved. Diomedes is destined by fate to cause the ruin of a town, but he himself could not care less about it or its underlying motives. He does not conquer Thebes as a hero consciously pursuing an act of disinterested public virtue, as all the other neoclassical heroes do; he conquers it, because it has insulted his love and destroyed his own, emphatically personal happiness. And it is in the course of this action that he himself causes the death of the person to save whom he has attacked the walls of the town. Thus the cause is in fact the enemy of its hero and makes him a tragic figure. Its moral import is quite peripheral; a necessary concession made by a neoclassical mind, but in fact quite insignificant for the story. The reader has constantly to be reminded of the fact that the purpose of the war is

*To awe injustice with her [Justice's] lifted spear,
And teach the tyrants of the earth to fear*²⁴.

The *Epigoniad* is easily the most colourful epic of the age; not indeed for its poetry (Hume's favourable criticism in that direction is rather mis-directed), but from the purely dramatic point of view. Owing to the hero's independence of the cause, the poet can create a character who is not a priori defined by it. But the *Epigoniad* is an isolated and much-slighted exception. As to all the other epics we can aptly describe their heroes with the words of Caledon's enraptured praise:

*These Hero's from above derive the Fire
And Force Divine, that does their Breasts inspire.
The God-like Vigour and th' immortal Ray
That breaks so brightly thro' their purer Clay
Kind Heav'n bestows, to form a noble Mind
For great Events and mighty deeds design'd
And from the glorious Fountain whence it came,
Divine Supplis must feed the Hero's Flame.
And when their Arms attempt illustrious Deeds,
Assisted from above their Sword succeeds,
Their Safety springs from Heav'n's peculiar Care,
And from its Aid their Laurels gain'd in War.
The Lord of Hosts dos in the Battel spread
His spacious Shield above his Favorite's Head.
He in the Army's Front dos still appear,
and shakes from far his vast Almighty Spear.
He whets his glitt'ring Sword, prepares his Bow,
And shoots his fatal Shafts amidst the Foe.
What certain Triumph may these Chiefs expect,
Whose Arms Omnipotence dos thus Protect?*²⁵.

3. THE CONSTANT HERO — THE STOIC

The nature of the hero's commission leaves little or no space for development of character. Constancy is its fundamental and most noble attribute. Unlike the novel, which was recognized by the classicists as representing a progressive evolution of character over and above the development of the action, the epic was supposed to show the hero on his first appearance in exactly the same mental, spiritual and physical comportment as on his last. It was not only the austerity of the cause which imposed this constancy on him, but also a curiously literal interpretation of one of Aristotle's laws, the law concerning the consistency of character. Next to rendering characters

'good', 'appropriate' and 'like the reality' the fourth requirement is—according to Aristotle—"to make them consistent and the same throughout. Even if inconsistency be part of the man ... he should still be consistently inconsistent"¹. Aristotle's formulation neither excludes a final change in the hero's fortunes nor does it forbid progressive goodness or badness in his character so long as its basic disposition is favourable to such an evolution. The classicists, however, looked upon consistency as visible constancy and unchangeability, the more so as the 'leitmotiv' of the hero's character had to be a cardinal virtue which could, of course, no longer be developed beyond the ideality it represented; wisdom, piety, moderation, generosity, magnanimity, constancy, patience, valour, care and concern for the people, truth, justice, fidelity, friendship are the qualities which are mentioned by the critics and which are to be displayed in full by the hero from the very beginning of the story. A typical expression of this attitude is Dennis's comment on Prince Arthur: "We find Prince Arthur appearing at first with three very commendable Qualities which were, Piety, Valour, and a Care and Concern for his People. So that the Poet is now oblig'd to maintain these Qualities in his Hero"². For Dennis, heroes who undergo gradual corruption like Satan, Adam and Eve, or gradual awakening from passiveness to conscious heroism like Iphigenia, are inconsistent, because outwardly inconstant. For the same reason Virgil's Aeneas is often accused of inconsistency because his cardinal virtue, piety, is not wholly constant. If on the other hand Homer's characters are mentioned as examples of constant heroes—the one in anger, the other in slyness—the critics usually left out the specification that they could only safely be so on account of their cardinal 'virtues' being rather colourful and plainly objectionable from the neo-classical point of view. Nowhere is such a specification made, so that in fact Homer is forced to stand for a neoclassical principle on the grounds of a primarily unneoclassical conception of character. The true eighteenth-century hero appears static on account of the ideality of his ruling sentiments, and indistinguishable from the other heroes because of the sheer impossibility for the poet to throw into relief (and to dissociate from most other virtues), one absolute virtue, or, in other words, to create individual sums total of all virtues.

If we try to gain a picture of the hero's character, we soon realize that we can do so only by adding up his various exemplary features which are without much interdependence enumerated by the epic writer in the course of the story. Since the hero's spiritual home is Heaven, since God looks down upon him as his saint, to whose pursuers he can say that in the hero "it is the Christian God, whom you pursue"³, he appears as a man of unchangeable perfection already in his youth. This is the first picture we receive of Prince Arthur through the account of Lucius at Hoel's banquet:

*God-like his Face, and God-like was his Mind,
To virtuous Deeds, and warlike Games inclin'd ...
And blooming Beauty grac'd his youthful years.
Yet wise and manly, far beyond his Age⁴.*

This is the pattern of physical and mental excellence, doomed to constancy from the outset, a pattern that has assumed its final character at the beginning of the story, and which can only be reiterated, hardly augmented, and never logically explained; a precocious perfection which is again alluded to by Lucius when he talks about the young man's deeds in the service of Odar against the Goths:

*His wondrous Virtues, wondrous Love engage,
That reach'd Perfection, long before his Age⁵.*

This is genuine neoclassical enthusiasm, inspired and sincere, if poetically undesirable, an enthusiasm with which the reader is to be enticed into enraptured admiration. Blackmore frequently uses the oblique method of commenting on the hero's character through the voices of people surrounding him, thereby adding to the conviction of his own praise. Thus his valour in battle is described by an eye-witness:

*He fought like Mars, though Mercury he seem'd.
Like some fair Cherub, or the Beamy God,
He wav'd his flaming Sword, and thro' their Squadrons rode.
His youthful Veins Heroick Ardor fir'd,
And more than human Force his Breast inspir'd⁶.*

Similarly bystanders on the road comment on him after he has landed on the British coast:

*Some praise his Stature, and his God-like Face,
His awful Presence, and Majestick Grace,
His Courage some, and Conduct in the Field,
And think great Caesar's Fame to his must yield,
His Clemency and Pity some admire,
And all the Virtues which his Mind inspire⁷.*

Those who are his enemies he likewise holds under his spell; the Saxons before the first battle

*All at his fearful Presence were amaz'd,
And on the glorious Foe with Wonder gaz'd.
Confusion seized them, and a chilling Damp
Went to their Hearts, thro' all the trembling Camp⁸.*

To those who are his friends, however, he is an unfailing source of inspiration and divine comfort. In the distress of the first shipwreck

*His God-like Language does their Fears abate,
And with fresh hopes their troubled Breasts dilate⁹;*

Lucius remembers how they thought

*some God-like Cherub to us spoke,
When from his lips these high Expressions broke¹⁰.*

He is the unshakable rock which the hostile powers in vain endeavour to crumble; he is the supreme Christian stoic. Arthur himself is quite aware of this, although in his modesty he looks upon this stoicism as a great goal which he has still to reach. Meditating on the characters of great sovereigns, he muses that

*Pois'd on their unshaken Base they view,
All the Vicissitudes, that Time can shew.
They, like tall Mountain's, are advanc'd so high,
That the low Clouds do all beneath them fly.
Hence while loud Storm's inferiour Seats molest,
They undisturb'd, enjoy soft Peace and Rest¹¹.*

The dramatic elements of suspense, surprise, anxiety on behalf of the hero's moral integrity are, from the outset, abandoned by the poet with a readiness that is astounding. What is believed to be character, is in fact only the enumeration of the various paragraphs of a moral code. *King Arthur* can add nothing to the image of the hero that has not been manifest already in *Prince Arthur*. Blackmore's second epic is only an attempt to exhaust more fully the range of high human qualities that seem typical of the outlook of an age rather than of one particular human being. It is now the "generous Pity¹²" of the King "who moved by Gallia's Crys, and Heav'n's Command" gives a repeated proof of his wholly disinterested virtue, a king

*Who by his Godlike Temper was inclin'd
To Pity, and support opprest Mankind¹³.*

Arthur once more combines the qualities of Christian clemency with those of political wisdom and those of the fierce warrior "who ne'er had felt the power of Fear¹⁴". If any single tendency in the hero's constant worth can be seen to become more distinct, it is his self-mastery. The last signs of apprehension or emotion have disappeared behind the inscrutability of his composed bearing. Nothing in the hero's face betrays his generous inward response to the suppliant Gallics, there is no thunderous rage when the King exposes the villain who has come to assassinate him whilst signing the treaty of peace. Having become a sovereign himself, he has reached the state of serene tranquility in which he himself had visualized the great rulers of the earth.

*He in the greatest Straights could ever find
Unshaken Courage, and a present Mind.
If happy or unhappy Tydings came,
His Godlike Temper ever was the same.
In Storms of State he was a Steady Guide,
Still ply'd the Helm, and stem'd th' impetuous Tyde.
No change of looks his inward Care confest,
And when he Suffer'd most, he show'd it least¹⁵.*

Alfred is a faithful copy of Arthur; a constant character in the neo-classical sense, who is described by a number of exemplary deeds and superlative encomiums. Although Alfred is supposed to be a boy going abroad to learn the art of ruling a country, his whole life is nevertheless "blameless and irreproachable" and characterized by physical and mental maturity of character. Guithun describes Alfred as a boy

*with num'rous princely Virtues bright,
The People's Darling and the Court's Delight*

who already in his tenderest years had

*Wonders shown
of Conduct, Strength, and Courage yet unknown¹⁶.*

These remarks only confirm what people round him instinctively know when they set eyes on the youthful wanderer for the first time. Thus Silva, the hermit, at once perceives in him

*The Marks of Greatness, and a noble Mind,
To Glory and Heroick Deeds inclin'd:
Such were his blooming Beauties, such his Grace,
And such his God-like Dignity of Face¹⁷.*

At the court of Artolan the courtiers express their admiration for the hero:

*His princely Mien by all Spectators prais'd,
And graceful Limbs that Love and Wonder rais'd,
While charming Form and Nobleness of Mind
To make a Prince like heav'nly Seraphs, join'd¹⁸.*

The picture of the saint is conjured up most distinctly on the occasion of his coronation in Rome:

*Such was the Hero's Port, and in his Face
Sweetness serene so soften'd princely Grace,
Such was his artless Dignity of Mind
And inbred Fire in proper Bounds confin'd,
He seem'd some Envoy from the Seats above,
That Awe excited and attracted Love¹⁹.*

In conformity to this awe-inspiring image of a spiritualized hero, his extraordinary character also manifests itself in his deeds and in his words. In the encounter with the panther he gives a proof of his unflinching courage when in spite of Guithun's immoderate fear he "dauntless stood to undertake the War²⁰"; with his bare hands he embraces and drowns the beast in the river. In affairs of vast political import, his armed intervention or his sheer "Eloquence divine²¹", his "wisdom²²" are again and again instrumental to the achievement of peace, justice and prosperity. In this fashion he displays at regular intervals the constancy of his character, unmolested by earthly evils because he is one of the chosen few "whose Minds are pure from gross terrestrial thoughts²³".

Queen Elizabeth, as a woman, is particularly suited to radiate that seraphic mildness and beatific grace in which already Blackmore's male heroes abound to an extent that merges into femininity, but which is one of the legitimate features of the contemporary epic hero. Even more than Arthur or Alfred, who are still active as warriors in rather primitive surroundings, Eliza is removed to the sphere of ideally refined neoclassical humanity. Her beauty and the pomp of her court shed a divine lustre which confounds the base and inspires the good. When the Spanish ambassadors are led into the presence of her "Whose bright, Majestick looks eclips'd her State²⁴", they are filled with strange terrors and gaze at the august appearance trembling; one of them, unable to bear the sight, averts his eyes and hides his face from her. Whereas Arthur and Alfred can occasionally corroborate, if not enrich, the picture of their characters in physical action, Eliza's greatness is purely descriptive and her character, if there is any, solely to be deducted from acts of statesmanship. We must surmise that she is prudent from the prudence with which she prepares the national defence; that she is moderate from the moderation which she shows in the taxation of her people; that she is tolerant from the toleration she evinces in her treatment of the Catholics and so on, but the personal meaning of these qualities is not the essential thing. It is the spirit of the ideal community which is embodied in the Queen, not her own, and for that purpose Blackmore has again to eliminate individual problems and to make his heroine a supreme stoic. Her constancy is fully described at a moment of black outward adversity, at the moment when the hostile intentions of Philip and the Pope threaten to destroy the country:

*When first the Queen did this loud Tempest bear,
Serene her Breast, and placid was her Air.
Brought up with Danger, and in Suff'ring bred,
She no uneasy or weak Passion fed,
But drew her Life out in an even Thread,
Fortune in every Shape she overcame,*

*That often chang'd, the Queen was still the same.
 She unelated met its flowing Tide,
 She undisturb'd beheld the Flood subside.
 Nor glorious Conquest, nor an adverse Stroke,
 The equal Balance of her Temper broke ...
 Eliza so her Heav'nly Mind possest,
 Sedate in Danger, and in Storms at rest²⁵.*

The character of Leonidas is of a similar stoic cast which allows him to appear unchanged and unchangeable in every instance of his poem. In the first council we receive the conclusive picture of his physical and mental excellence. When he rises in the assembly, unheedful of the safety of his own life, and sacrifices himself for the common cause, the others gaze upon him with infinite awe:

*Dignity and Grace
 Adorn his frame, and manly beauty join'd
 With strength Herculean. On his aspect shines
 Sublimest virtue, and desire of fame,
 Where justice gives the laurel, in his eye
 The inextinguishable spark, which fires
 The souls of patriots: while his brow supports
 Undaunted valour, and contempt of death²⁶.*

As in Blackmore's poems, the hero's superhuman fortitude is frequently set off against the panic fear of those around him, thus raising his lofty greatness to a still higher pitch. When the tidings of Epialtes's treason reach the Spartan host,

*unutterable fear
 In horrid silence wrapt the list'ning throng,
 Aghast, confounded²⁷.*

But Leonidas, unmoved, counteracts the treacherous movement with instant tactical measures and encourages his men in "calmest elocution²⁸"; like all neoclassical heroes he is an exquisite orator. His virtue puts to shame all attempts by base friend or foe to distract him from his sacred duty, his mind is free from temptation,

*In crimes unfruitful, never to admit
 The black impression of a guilty thought²⁹.*

Physically and spiritually unchanged and unimpaired he goes to his final doom.

*No toil had yet relax'd his matchless strength,
 Nor worn the vigour of his god-like soul³⁰,*

when the treacherous arrow inflicts the fatal wound on him. Even its pain is made ineffectual in the serene smile that rises in his face at the thought of his dying for the public cause.

Ogilvie's Brutus belongs to the same group of stoics and like all the other heroes unites in himself all the desirable beauties of body and mind. The poet is indeed bold enough to make him a man "past the prime of life"³¹, and we are for this reason more readily inclined to believe that he possesses the maturity of mind with which the author invests him. But Ogilvie makes sure to remind us that in spite of his advanced years he remains the leading warrior of the nation whose "vigorous hand still grasp'd the faulchion"³²; when the battle against Androgeus becomes desperate, it is he who descends on the enemy and rallies his disheartened troops with "matchless grace, and power beyond control"³³. Nevertheless, Ogilvie would fail to convince us that Brutus is the real hero of the poem if we were only to judge heroes by their martial prowess. His son Locrinus rivals and often surpasses him in looks and heroic deeds and more often than Brutus spreads that terror amongst the enemy by his presence, and that dejection amongst his friends by his absence, which are usually inspired by the leading character. But again, Locrinus is inferior to the true neoclassical hero as represented by his father, because battle is really only a pretext for presenting action, not the essence of a hero. Locrinus is inferior to Brutus because desire for personal fame is still a powerful motive of his actions, and because he is ready to relinquish the common cause as soon as his love for the abducted Almeria demands it. Brutus is the true hero because he is the true stoic, ever unchanged and unchangeable, forgetful of his own desires, incorruptible, prudent, cautious, clement, wise in everything he does. Like all the other heroes, he is the abstract picture of man's redemption through the renunciation of earthly desires. True to this picture he resists the temptations of the pleasure island, not indeed because his passion is with his body tied to the mast of his ship like that of Odysseus, but because

*No passion sway'd his thought, nor lure decay'd
His eye; nor prize, though tempting, turn'd his course*³⁴.

In the extremity of corruption and battle or storm

*Alone, the God-like leader, undismay'd,
Stood fix'd as Pelion, when the tempest sweeps
His sides, immovable. His Mind retain'd
Its powers, in adverse, as in prosperous change,
Alike serene*³⁵.

The vocabulary is strikingly identical with that of Blackmore.

As a character, the hero of Ogden's *The Revolution* is even more elusive and impersonal than the heroine of Blackmore's epic. The extreme stress on the political aspects of the story, the sheer vastness and intricacy of the events in which he is involved as a statesman, do not allow enough space for the

poet to describe the hero's character or appearance by means of active representation, but only by summary remarks which we are expected to accept as correct. More than all the other heroes, William is the invisible motive power behind a solemn event of universal meaning, completely forgetful of his own problems and without any personal concerns. We only learn of his constant worth at second hand, for instance from what Danby says about him when he suggests him as a suitable successor to the throne:

*The Prince of Orange, Lords,
Is politic, more minding deeds than words;
Of vast ambition, with extensive views,
What he begins, he steadily pursues*³⁶.

The first and only description of his appearance is given on the occasion of his second crossing to Britain, where we see the hero standing erect on his ship:

*Upon the quarter deck the Hero stands,
Stately his port in profile aquiline,
His countenance seem'd pregnant with design;
Grave in deportment, with a piercing eye,
As eagles, which after their quarry spy,
And dart from Heav'n's high arch upon the prey,
Then soar undazzl'd in the solar ray;
So his sharp ken, with circumspective glance,
Pervading all the mists of ignorance ...*³⁷.

Elsewhere, the poet tells us in a few words that the hero is "cautious", not only blindly brave

*Yet seizing each contingency, that rose
To free his country, and distress her foes*³⁸,

that he is "Foremost in danger, as of nought afraid"³⁹". Usually it is only the mention of the accomplished deed which is to prove to us that the man's character is really what the poet tells us it is. As in the case of Eliza, we are largely obliged to derive it from his political procedures. We assume that his is an enterprising spirit because he is willing to enter on a rather hazardous scheme; we take it that he is cunning since he manages to keep his preparations a secret from the world outside, and so on, but in *The Revolution*, as in every other poem mentioned, the hero is not meant to represent himself, but the ideals of a large community. He stands for a good principle, and no laudable quality which we may attribute to him is misapplied or incompatible with the abstract nature of his character.

If in the case of all these poems a selection from the panegyric epithets bestowed on their heroes suffices to define their characters, the *Epigoniad* presents a somewhat different aspect. Here we can undertake to trace a

picture of an individual man, because the hero does not conform to the usual pattern of constancy and stoicism. His actions are immediate manifestations of an unruly character; the chief problem of the poem is a personal one. It reflects the hero's temper, not that of the cause.

A dramatic polarity is brought to light in the opening scene, which introduces Diomedes as a man who for the sake of a siege, in which he has not the least personal interest, has to part from the woman he loves, at a time when he has every reason to believe that his absence may enable his hated rival to win her for himself. The first action of the hero in which his love and his duty clash, reveals to us that Diomedes, though a renowned warrior, is a man whose generous instincts are easily subdued and swayed by his excitability and by the desire of a moment. It is his love and his jealousy which prompt him to announce in council the withdrawal not only of himself, but—to cover up his own retreat—of his whole army. He is perfectly aware of the dishonesty of his behaviour, which shows that it is only the extremity of his passion that momentarily darkens the basic goodness of his character, and it is a natural reaction when after having been overruled by the generals, he plunges into battle with redoubled energy, partly from a desire to prove that it was not cowardice which was the motive of his counsel, and partly from an overflow of relief at not having executed his ignoble plan. Once he is again a warrior, he applies himself to his duty with the same fervour that characterizes him at moments when love is the uppermost passion in him. Furthermore, a speedy conclusion of the war is now the only solution that ensures an equally speedy return to Cassandra. When at this juncture, therefore, the seven days' truce is debated, he votes against it; funeral rites and games mean nothing to him in the face of this new delay; impatience and selfishness again blind him to the dictates of decency. Once more he is overruled, and the slight he thus believes to have received only adds to his mortification and frustration and drives him to a new act of conscious obstinacy: he argues that he has not agreed to the truce and that, therefore, he is not obliged to observe it. When Deiphobos, in just indignation, upbraids him for his intended treachery and persuades his soldiers to refuse allegiance, he puts the spark to the explosive temper of the hero. Pent-up feelings, frustration, slight, forced inactivity, jealousy, hate of his own weakness all combine to incite him to the desperate act of killing his friend and mentor, only to be plunged into instant remorse, remorse which soon gives way to self-pity. It is in this state of mind that Cassandra is recognized by the hero, and it seems in accordance with his character when he now casts on her, as the cause of his misery, the whole burden of his own guilt which his conscience cannot bear. But her rejection is only the beginning of further evil which Diomedes heaps upon himself through his impetuosity. A renewed torrent of feelings bursts upon him when he learns that his

harshness has caused the capture of Cassandra. Now it is not only the conflict between love and duty which torments him, but also the agony of having injured the very object of his love. If his rage towards the Thebans who captured her renders him inclined to wreak instant revenge on them, it is nevertheless the thought of Cassandra's safety which compels him to agree to the special twenty days' truce with Creon. But again duty interferes with his plan when the Theban king breaks the previous seven days' truce. Diomedes is bound by necessity and honour to stay away from the war, but the cause, too, claims his obedience. Odysseus uses his knowledge of the hero's character to provoke his pride with allusions to his cowardice, and kindles it with the painfully dammed-up rage against Creon. To be able to do something is like redemption for the hero. His easily excitable nature gladly acknowledges Odysseus's arguments. Forgetful even of his duty to give orders to his troops he rushes on to the battlefield. The reward for his heedless action is the sight of Cassandra's head waved from the city-wall. His immediate reaction is to scale the wall in an effort of blind despair. His troops are slow to follow him, his attack fails and on top of that he hurts his fingers in the attempt. An excellent situation to burst into a volley of curses! Small wonder then that, looking round in hot anger and catching sight of Odysseus, he immediately recognizes in him the scapegoat for the latest disaster and gives vent to his fury in a violent attack on the Ithacan hero. But here Pallas puts a stop to Diomedes's headlong frenzy by seizing him and shaking him to make him see reason. When he comes to, he is humbled and ashamed and asks for Odysseus's forgiveness. In a last effort the wall is taken and the town destroyed. But the upheavals of the recent past have burnt out the hero's pride. Born down by his loss and the consequences of his reckless behaviour, he resolves to mend his ways in the future.

Thus we receive a fairly distinct and consistent picture of an individual human being, raised into monumental dimensions. We get to know the hero's character, because his actions reveal a psychologically definable pattern. It is of little import in this context, that Wilkie did not possess sufficient artistic discipline to avoid unnecessary conventionalities and digressions, and that his poetry does not attain to the dramatic merits of his story. More important—and also particularly illustrative of the state of epic poetry—is the fact that Wilkie revived the epic of dramatic character, but that, at the same time, he had to fall back on the Homeric simplicity and primitivity of background and passion to be able to do so at all. He gives us indeed an individual portrait of a man, but the metaphysical validity which should raise an epic above the limits of the bygone age which provides its concrete stage, is not there, and consequently the *Epigoniad* is little more than a modest imitation of Homer's *Iliad*, a poem "as it might have been written two thousand years ago"⁴⁰.

4. THE EVIL PRINCIPLE AND THE AUTHOR'S BIAS

The ideal qualities which the hero possesses are, if to a lesser degree, the qualities also of his closest friends and helpers; those who sincerely believe in the justice of the cause are essentially good men. The poet himself has clearly and uncompromisingly pledged his loyalty to it. For him the epic is a fervent confession of political, religious and philosophical beliefs, a pamphlet, a polemic treatise, a moral code. In contradiction to Aristotle's warning that the poet is to appear "in propria persona"¹ as little as possible, the neoclassical epic writer is the all-pervading, omnipresent personality of his poem; he constantly qualifies the actors and their deeds. The result is an unmistakable bias, a partiality that bans everything morally negative and everything incompatible with the author's outlook from the precincts of the cause and confines it to the sphere of those powers which are opposed to that cause. The neoclassical dramatic exposition is characterized by the duality of friend and foe in the sense of good and evil.

This professed partisanship of the authors signifies an enormous step backwards in the history of the epic. Homer's and Virgil's epics derive much of their greatness from the very disputability in them of right and wrong, from the unbiassed representation of human actions, on the merit of which even the gods are at loggerheads, and over which they grow factious. There the words friend and foe lose their meaning in the face of sheer human drama—or who would think of judging Achilles and Hector by such terms? The clash of two men on whose behalf we feel equal concern is, on the contrary, the essence of a dramatic effect that reaches into the transcendental. Death overwhelms us even in the person of the 'enemy'.

Inexorable poetic justice as it is manipulated by the author of the neoclassical epic, condemns the powers opposed to the cause as the evil principle, and it does so to the same extent as it exalts the good principle in the hero and his followers.

This unequivocal division into moral categories is most outspoken where the evil principle is embodied by itself, by the Devil, that is in Blackmore's epics, in *The Revolution* and in *Britannia*. The identification of the hero with God and his cause, however, turns the Devil into a rather ineffectual opponent. Since Providence anticipates and openly predicts the final triumph of Arthur, Eliza, Alfred, William and Brutus, his task can only be that of temporarily retarding the smooth development of the action. But even this retardation is limited in its ways, because the hero's stoicism gives little scope and hope for subtle schemes directed against his virtue. For this reason—perhaps also for the sake of visual action—Satan's destructive policy rarely envisages the moral corruption of his enemy; the evil principle mostly manifests itself in attempts at bringing about the physical destruction of the

hero. We need not go into details; the synopses of the poems² show clearly that the means adopted by Satan are storms, fog, darkness, diseases, treason, murder, and so on. But there are no points of contact between good and evil within the hero's own breast; from his point of view, the evil principle is entirely extra-personal, and Satan—alienated from his real purpose—in effect abandons the province of sin and takes over the functions of death. In other words: Satan is no longer capable of seducing man's mind. He is past the stage of agony in which he had still looked upon himself as a fallen angel rather than as the sovereign of hell, past the stage in which he had managed to perpetrate the subtle scheme of the apple and to see in the fall of Adam and Eve the defeat of God. An experience that had only been possible because he had also known what goodness meant.

The neoclassical Lucifer is evil undiluted. He has lost the sense of proportion that had once consciously motivated his position and his actions. He is proud to be "unmix'd with Good, and with Remorse unstain'd"³; he suffers from the delusion of being just; he and his followers refer to his activities as "just Wars"⁴, or "righteous cause"⁵, or "great and just revenge"⁶". He rejoices to see in his helpmates "noble proofs of growing Cruelty"⁷ or the "noble Zeal"⁸ with which they pursue massacre and ruin amongst the Christians. In *The Revolution*, similarly, Satan is only called upon to be the actor of perfidious deeds without being a dramatic figure in himself. From Satan's point of view, accordingly, the heroes appear as wrongdoers, as infidel and vainglorious adventurers. He looks upon Arthur as the "vain Briton" and upon his army as an "impious host"⁹. Alfred's peoples are "impious Nations, who have broke my sacred Altars"¹⁰; he talks of "the vain ambitious Ends he has in view"¹¹; Brutus is described on his glorious voyage as "swell'd with presumptuous joy"¹². The reactions of Satan to his continual defeats are, therefore, usually those of a character that fancies himself injured in his just pride as a sovereign. Not remorse, sadness, or envy are his ruling passions, but uncontrolled rage, that turns him into a picture of loathsome ugliness. He appears with "bloodshot Eyes", "with Spite and Rage inflam'd"¹³, "enormous Rage distended every vein"¹⁴, "o'erboiling Rage his lab'ring Mind possess"¹⁵, "Revenge and deadly Rage disturb'd his Breast"¹⁶", he glows in "Rage uncontroll'd"¹⁷, he is "with rage and scorn inflamed"¹⁸.

The psychological weakness of the hellish characters in the eighteenth-century epic proves how prudent the ancients, and again Milton, were when they treated their supernatural machinery as psychologically consistent beings, and how detrimental to the narrative interest was the conception of the classicists when they delegated the moral categories to separate and opposed groups of actors. In one instance Blackmore unconsciously puts his finger on this basic error when he makes Satan ascend to God and complain about the hero's godlike invulnerability.

*Arthur, encompass'd with Celestial Bands,
As if a God invulnerable stands.
King Arthur's Arms immortal wreaths have won
By Power receiv'd from hence, and not his own*¹⁹.

*In vain his Foes their hot Revenge pursue,
He must prevail, till Heav'n they first subdue*²⁰.

The fortnight granted him by God is the only time during which God and Satan seem to confront each other with equal hope of success. It is Blackmore's fault when he can think of nothing else but making Satan waste his time by letting loose on the hero winds, heat, dragons, and frightful spectres instead of putting him to severe moral tests, and when he represents God as a mean cheater by rendering Arthur immune against all dangers with sundry balms and charms. The cause which has to be, and will be, victorious, leaves no doubt about the result of the test and suspends any potential dramatic tension, although this test was certainly intended by Blackmore for the opposite purpose. For dramatic reasons, too, Blackmore relates the incident of the hero's corruption in *Alfred*. It is a passing episode to relieve the monotony of ideality, but it is quite unmotivated, without any repercussions in the hero's life, quite inconsistent with his character and only to be understood as a self-contained, isolated story.

By and large we can say that the infernal personages have sunk to the status of clumsy intriguers whose efficiency and effective range of action are negligible and in no proportion to the pomp and pathos with which they are introduced. It is the conception of the hero which determines this development.

The evil principle finds its agents in the hero's enemies, just as the good principle finds its representatives in the hero and his friends. And if the latter are characterized by the qualities of their spiritual leader, of God, the former resemble the nature of their lord, Satan. The hostility of these men is again not personal but representative of the collective hostility of the bad cause against the good one. The real antagonists in the case of Blackmore's Arthurian epics are not Arthur and Octa, or Arthur and Clotar, but Christian Religion and paganism on the one hand and popular monarchy and despotism on the other. The real meaning of the struggle between Eliza and Philip, or between William and James is that between Protestantism and Roman Catholicism. Similar characterizations can be made for all the epics of the time. It is an ideology which is fanatically upheld against, and contrasted with, the principle that, in the author's opinion, appears diametrically opposed to it, and which is therefore depicted in its agents with all the monumental abhorrence engendered by the writer's bias. Octa, the Saxon

usurper, is depicted as a subvertor of rights and ancient laws, as a tyrant with a lawless will, steeped in lust and crimes. A favourite device of representing such a man and his deeds, is to describe him lying sleepless on his bed at night, vexed and tormented by horrible nightmares. Thus Octa appears, dreading the end of his illicit career:

*His dreadful Crimes affright his startled Soul,
And in his Breast black Tides of Horror roll.
Dire Shapes, and staring ghosts pass threat'ning by,
And Streaks of Fire across th' Apartment fly.
He hears the Shrieks of those his bloody Hand
Had murder'd, or that dy'd by his Command:
He hears the Widows' Sighs and Orphans' Moans,
Himself had made, and tortur'd Pris'ners Groans.
The Grounds of pale Despair he sometimes draws
From Arthur's Valour, and his righteous Cause²¹.*

The Gallic ambassadors who appeal to King Arthur say about their king, Clotar:

*He mocks his Gods, their Laws he disregards,
And scorns alike their Vengeance and Rewards.
Our noblest Virgins from their Parents torn
Are to his Bed with Barb'rous Outrage born.
In every Town unheard of Rapes assuage
His Lust, as endless Murders do his Rage²².*

Like Octa he is sometimes visited by terrible pangs of fear in the dead of night:

*Ten thousand Horrors did his thoughts affright
And ghastly Figures passed before his sight.
Sometimes he thought he heard the dismal Cry
Of suff'ring Prisoners begging leave to dy.
He saw extended Martyrs on the Rack,
And thought he heard their tortur'd Members crack.
He saw poor Widdows delug'd in their tears,
And Crys of helpless Orphans fill'd his Ears²³.*

The traitors of the cause at home are characterized in a few words; Miraldo, the Prelate, is "male-content", "hot", "impetuous", "revengeful", "turbulent", "false to his Vows", "to Broils and Strife inclined²⁴". Botran is ruled by

*Inexorable Hatred, Pride unmixt,
Desp'rate Revenge, and Malice deeply fixt,
With Wrath from every Stain of Love refin'd²⁵.*

If Philip of Spain is, for his followers, the "just and gentle King²⁶", the cause stamps him a black criminal, cruel, perfidious, turbulent of mind, eminent in treason, in league with Rome and Hell. He, too, shares the agonies of the guilty soul; on his bed at night

*He turn'd from Side to Side, but turn'd in vain.
A thousand Terrors interrupt his Rest,
A thousand Troubles vex his anxious Breast ...
The Ghosts of murder'd Men past by his Bed,
They show'd their Ghastly Wounds, and shook their Head²⁷.*

In *Alfred* it is a series of bad rulers and peoples who pass in review at the various stages of the hero's journey. There is Garcia at Navarre, governed by "Thirst of false Glory" and "haughty Pride", "ambitious", "lawless", "rapacious", "treacherous", "neglectful of his subjects²⁸"; or there is Raman at Cologne, "proud", versed in "black crimes", "cruel", "destroying the guiltless", "pleased with slaughter", "mocking despair²⁹"; or there is Roderick of Burgundy, a miser, extorting "sums enormous" from his subjects, defending his lawless position by means of prisons and soldiers. The licentious Sicilians are described as holding feasts day and night, lost in drunkenness, singing obscene songs and heathen tales, indulging in lascivious love, revelling in endless mirth³⁰. Glover infuses more dignity into the hero's chief opponent, Xerxes, though he is declared to be devoid of virtue³¹. He tries to represent him as a man who is naturally convinced of his being 'dei gratia rex', haughty, imperious, the leader of slaves and enslaved nations, but not unmindful of the transitoriness of his glory; free from excessive cruelty and rather astonished at the heroic stand of the Spartans. More reminiscent of the usual pattern are Epialtes, the traitor,

*eloquent his tongue,
But false his heart, and abject. He was skill'd
To grace perfidious counsels; and to cloath
In swelling phrase the baseness of his soul,
Foul nurse of treason³².*

Or Argestes, the councillor of Xerxes:

*None more practic'd in the arts
Of mean submission, none more skill'd to gain
The royal favour; none, who better knew
The phrase, the looks, and gesture of a slave³³.*

Or the cowardly sniper who kills Leonidas:

*None in Xerxes' court
Was more corrupt, with insolence more base,
With rancour more fallacious³⁴.*

King James II. appears as "bigot James", "priestridden³⁵", counselled by superstition, "e'er self-deluded" by his "weak mind", "to ev'ry better purpose quite estrang'd³⁶", and "Prob'd to the quick, with guilt's all-searching sting³⁷". In *Britannia* the Gerontes are the "tyrants of the land³⁸",

*a direful race,
In manners savage as in form, Their rude hands
Against th' Eternal, impious as their sire,
They lift in horrid war³⁹.*

Gerontes himself is "by stature raised to power⁴⁰"; he is old but of an unbridled temper and undisciplined,

*To tear and to enjoy his victim, his fell heart
Prompts him instinctive; cooler thoughts, the voice
Of ire or headlong appetite repells⁴¹.*

Then there is Vortiger, "sly", "fraudful", "his thought by courage uninformed", he "trembling shuns the battle⁴²". Romerus is the only one of the giants who possesses native valour and virtue. He, too, is a typical neo-classical figure. In nearly all the epics there is this lonely Abdiel in a sea of evil, the outsider who finds his way back to the good cause or is tragically involved in the doom of his own people, just as there is always the traitor in the ranks of those who champion the good cause. In this manner the classicists try to alleviate the unnatural one-sidedness of the opposite issues and to introduce some complexity, if not into individual persons, into the character at least of the 'principles'.

In the *Epigoniad* Homeric and pseudo-aristotelian trends collide unfavourably. Since the good and the evil principles are united in the drama of the hero's own character, there is no need, nor indeed any reason, to indulge in the ordinary partiality, and to parcel out good and bad to opposite parties; Diomedes is his own enemy. On the one hand, Wilkie avoids the danger of partiality because of his prepossession with his hero's character; the Thebans are brave and liable to the same human passions as the Greeks, and we often wonder why the town has to be destroyed and punished at all. But then there is also the cause which urges the poet to remind his readers from time to time, that in the past the city has incurred the displeasure of the Gods and that the Greek army is the instrument of ultimate justice. He therefore symbolizes in Creon, the king, the 'perfidy and oaths profaned' which are the cause of the siege; Creon confesses to all his "crimes⁴³" without letting us know what they are except his last which is the murder of Cassandra. But just as the cause grows insignificant in the face of the hero's own problem, so the embodiment of the evil principle in Creon is an unnecessary and peripheral addition to satisfy the rigidity of the epic 'laws' of the poet's own time.

The poet of the neoclassical epic is a preacher. He has a message to pass on and he makes sure that its contents are unmistakable. As a partaker of the universal issues at stake, he sheds abundance of light on whatever he sincerely believes is good, and gives over to damnation whatever opposes his ideals. But he cannot do this without perverting the traditional epic devices, without alienating the various traditional elements of the narrative from their former meaning and function.

5. THE LOSS OF INDIVIDUAL ACTION

In the authentic epic, and also in the literary epic which took over the heroic ideal, the important thing was not what people thought about life but how they lived it in their deeds. Action is the hallmark of heroic poetry, the visible impact of the hero's physical deportment. He aims at 'fama extendere factis', he exalts himself through deeds. Naturally the most convenient medium in which to present such spectacular individual action was the most dignified kind of violent action, war. War at the same time fulfilled the purpose of exalting man's greatness or lamenting his doom and that of rendering the poem predominantly active.

In the eighteenth-century epic things are changed. War as a means of interpreting exalted humanity has become peripheral and incomplete; we have seen that the consciousness of its inadequacy as a self-sufficient theme is a distinct feature of the discussion. In the epic poems this is even more obvious. They all deal with war to a greater or lesser degree, but here it has no longer the double function of supplying a good story and of explaining 'man's purpose in the world'; it is obviously only the pretext for action, a counterpoise to the hero's unobtrusive stoicism and gentlemanliness; the eighteenth-century poets feel that they will not be able to tell a story without it.

But there is really only one heroic poem, one poem of which war forms an integral part: Glover's *Leonidas*. The achievement of freedom is only possible in the armed conflict between the numberless hosts of Xerxes and the small group of Spartans. It is the drama of many people owing much to a few in a clash that is inevitable and necessary, and which has a meaning for the hero's life, because it also involves his death. The other two poems which are largely preoccupied with war, namely the *Epigoniad* and *Britannia*, are merely pseudo-heroic. Wilkie's subject is the analysis of a hot temper finally subdued to reason, a subject that is not dependent on war because it is a sufficient argument in itself and not linked with the principle of 'fama extendere factis'. Here, undoubtedly, war is coincidental, taken up merely for the sake of active representation, of movement and spectacular individuality.

Ogilvie is quite outspoken about the irrelevance of war in a truly modern epic. His ultimate yearning is the establishment of a world in which all men of noble mind are peacefully united. In a long invective he rejects war from a humanitarian point of view. "Thou worst of human plagues, destructive war, ... be thy rage Accursed¹!", and yet he makes abundant use of it. Although the poet deplores the ferocity of war, although he documents his love of peace in the ever recurring motif of the Trojans and Albions trying to achieve a mutual alliance, the heroes themselves are all burning with martial rage. Thus the real theme, the quietness of dignified humanity is, for the sake of 'storytelling', crudely patched over with the irrelevant characteristics of purely heroic warfare. In his preface the poet leaves no doubt about the fact that even if the last poem of the century is the most warlike, or the most active one, this does not mean that he considers these activities typical of, and valid for, the time in which he is writing. He is much rather admitting the unsuitability of modern society as a poetical background in the grand epic manner. The experience of a century has convinced him that the inevitable process of abstraction in a truly modern epic has yielded unsatisfactory results in those who had been bold enough to disregard this fact. He may also have observed that Glover and Wilkie, who had been chief exponents of neoclassical epic poetry in a stricter sense, had received the larger share of applause from the public than those who preferred to be 'modern'. Thus Ogilvie's poem is primitive and warlike only as a consequence of the experience that a *modern* epic poem can no longer be primitive and warlike; its simplicity is derived from the consciousness of complexity, and in that special sense *Britannia*, too, is a very 'modern' poem despite its traditional heroism. It is the correlative to Dixon's theory in the twentieth century, according to which the action is eventually more important than its meaning, because the epic would have to die if it was not colossally active.

We have elsewhere indicated that owing to the essential nature of the epic crisis we frequently come across phenomena which at first sight we should expect to find much later or much earlier than when they actually appear. Ogilvie's epic affords one instance; if we did not know the reasons which prompted the poet to write a simple heroic poem, we should have to wonder at the apparent retrogression it represents in comparison with most of the earlier poems. Blackmore's epics, even those of Arthur and Alfred, where the poet handles subjects of comparative antiquity, are more regardlessly modern than *Britannia*. They are more reflective and abstract and less heroic than *Britannia*, because Blackmore did not yet know the dangers of abstraction. In his epics, battle already bears the signs of mere narrative substance, a loop-hole for spectacular activity. It is already a retarding element, episodic with regard to the cause. It is purely imitative

of Homeric warfare without possessing its significance, so that the discrepancy between the actual value of battle scenes and their function becomes evident in the fact, that the accounts of combat merely describe individual prowess, whereas the meaning of war has been completely shifted from this aspect to its general political or religious consequences. Blackmore must have felt the inadequacy of this procedure when in *Alfred* he dispensed with war altogether, although he had no convincing substitute for the loss of grand action caused by this renunciation. One of the most outstanding feats of the hero is, on the contrary, when he manages as a mediator to separate without bloodshed the opposed parties amongst Artolan's subjects, and to bring about a peaceful agreement between them.

No better did the poets fare who hoped to circumvent the anachronisms of ancient heroism by introducing modern warfare, believing thus to preserve the source of grand action. Since the sword and the spear have ceased to be the warrior's awe-inspiring weapons, his personality has lost its powerful omnipresence. Indiscriminate and undramatic slaughter is the aspect of the modern epic battle. When Eliza's troops are challenged by the Spaniards,

*To charge the Foe the eager Britons flew,
And missive Fires, and Hand Granadoes threw*².

The individual fighter disappears when

*Unseen Destruction swiftly thro' the Skies,
In leaden Tempests back and forwards flies.
Their pond'rous Balls in Vollies they [the cannons] unload,
And Massy Death in Flame and Smoke explode*³,

or

*The gaping Brass sends out imprison'd Lead,
Rakes their Brigades, and lays in Rows the Dead*⁴.

The Battle of the Boyne in *The Revolution* is described in similar terms:

*While the explosive fire of either side,
Of cannon roar'd, by Engineers well ply'd,
With hail globose, of iron shot exchang'd,
Which through the forming ranks destructive rang*⁵.

The tactical movements, too, have become too complicated to be described in poetic language and are mentioned in a few impersonal words:

*The warriors firm, resolv'd, and obstinate,
Prolong'd the Combate, with uncertain Fate.
The Spaniard now, and now the Britons yield,
And in their turn they win, and lose the field.
While Vict'ry undetermin'd did decide*

*For neither part, and War from side to side,
With equal Kindness roll'd its quick alternate Tide*⁶.

Occasionally the poet ventures to accentuate this picture of collective heroism or destruction with acts of valour in the old style. But in comparison with the impersonal grandeur of the cause, these occasional glimpses of heroes flourishing their swords and terrifying whole armies, easily border on the ludicrous and really only serve to deepen the impression of the incongruity of traditional and modern elements in epic poetry. How insignificant and comical seems Blackmore's Vere when amidst the din of roaring cannons and wholesale slaughter he sets out to save the magic of the Homeric warrior:

*Waving his Faulchion, with a Martial Air,
He march'd along, denouncing dreadful War*⁷.

Similarly William is described as fighting in the van of the army with his brandished sword, but we do not see him actually performing his deeds of valour; it is again the poet who tells us that he did perform them and that

*Success, at his great acts, ber eagle wing
Exulting wav'd*⁸,

and that

*Louder than trumpets, which the charge impell'd,
His praise Fame sounded*⁹.

It seems conclusive that martial activity fails to provide the logical background for the hero's transactions. It is episodic and meaningless in its traditional aspects and impersonal and descriptive in its modern ones.

However, it is not only the unsuitability of war as an epic subject which causes the hero to become less and less active, less personal, less conspicuous. Their outbursts of exertion and physical accomplishment cannot disguise the fact that most of these heroes are basically men of brooding temper, 'cunctatores' up to the time of their commissioning and often afterwards. The loss of action and of story lies as much in the circumstance that Arthur, for instance, as a spiritual leader, is more important than Arthur, the general; and that more important still than Arthur, the spiritual leader, is Arthur the Saint. He is praised as a great warrior,

*But his Religious Zeal and Pure Beliefs
Crown'd with Immortal Praise the Pious Chief*¹⁰.

He is not a man of deeds in the first place, but a hermit, an introvert who hearkens to the voice of God, and who waits to be led in order to lead:

*Much to his conduct he, much to his Arms,
But more he trusted to Devotions Charms*¹¹.

When the Prince's army is thrown on the coast of Hoel's hostile country, we do not hear about the exertions with which the shattered host bears up to the dangerous situation, we only hear Arthur preach and console his exhausted troops, and in fact,

*What more cheer'd them than their Meats and Wine,
Was wise Instruction, and Discourse Divine,
From God-like Arthur's Mouth*

who "reason'd deep of Heav'n's mysterious Ends", "Speaking of Truth divine, and Wisdom infinite!¹²". It may seem ridiculous to us that a hungry soldier should be more cheered by pious talk than by a square-meal, but it is indeed in keeping with the spirit of Blackmore's time, or at least with the spirit he must have known in his youth. We need only read Scott's account of the Battle of Loudon-hill to realize how protestant zeal was capable of abandoning all thought of earthly sustenance whilst listening entranced to inspired sermons for literally hours on end immediately after a hot battle. It is this spiritual 'action' which is again and again described by Blackmore. After the above-mentioned disaster of the fleet Arthur retires to a lonely cave to continue his meditations away from the anonymous mass of his army. His meditative isolation is symbolical of his real sphere of existence: it is the glory of eternal life he is striving for, not the glory of the authentic hero. It thrills him to think that in the after-life heroes may "forget their toil and pain" of their earthly existence and there reign "in Eternal Peace¹³".

True heroes now *scorn this World, that courts in vain their Love.*

*In Flames of Zeal, and Pangs of pure Desire,
These to the Seats of Light and Peace aspire¹⁴.*

The conclusion which the new abstract hero reaches is that "This Molehill Earth has lost its former Charms¹⁵". The whole of books II and III again deal with transcendental truths, they are the sermons of a preacher, not the actions of a hero in the old sense; Arthur relates to Hoel the myth of the creation and of the Last Judgement, an attempt to interpret man's fate not by means of enacting an individual life, but by means of describing the powers on which all our lives are believed to depend. When at Hoel's banquet a bard contributes to the entertainment, he does not sing of heroic achievements,

*He the great Spirit sung, that all things fill'd,
That the tumultuous Waves of Chaos still'd.
Whose Nod dispos'd the jarring Seeds to Peace,
And made the Wars of hostile Atoms cease¹⁶.*

Whilst the battered fleet is being repaired—a process which the poet cannot describe in the vivid terms of an eye-witness and which is therefore only mentioned in one sentence—Arthur, in continuation of his missionary duties,

leads Hoel to the Druids' Grove where his "words inspire the King with holy Transports, and Seraphick Fire"¹⁷. A whole book of *King Arthur* is taken up by pious Caledon's sermon on God's omnipotence, another one by captured Clovis's spiritual struggle as a martyr¹⁸. In *Eliza* the death of Vere's son Alban provides the poet with the opportunity of expounding on the mystery of death. Eliza herself, who cannot display the martial valour of the old hero, is a purely reflective type of character. For her, too, the peace of Heaven is more significant than the war on earth, and the devaluation of physical action becomes nowhere more palpable than here where the task of enacting the 'story' of the poem is left to the care of subordinate characters. The supreme reward for the heroine is not earthly glory but a glimpse of eternal life which she is granted after the victory over the Spaniards, when

*Rapture Devine did on the Queen descend,
And heav'nly Influx did her Breast extend.
Extatick Heat her lab'ring Heart oppress'd,
And struggling Joy the Pow'r within confess'd,
While with her God the Royal Virgin strove,
In pious Pangs of ardent Zeal and Love;
Too full of Heav'n, and with excessive Day
O'erwhelm'd, the Queen in blissful Transports lay*¹⁹.

Alfred is equally pious; but the fervent protestant partisanship, which makes Blackmore's first three epics the unmistakable documents of the aftermath of the civil wars here reappears in a more moderate form. The chief concern of Alfred now is to establish the ideal Christian state, he himself being the mediator between Heaven and earth, solicitous of the welfare of his people, but like Arthur or Eliza not at heart prepossessed with things earthly, but "with heat Divine inspir'd"²⁰. Nevertheless, the religious theme is only one out of several which through their gravitating towards abstraction contribute to drain the epic of active movement. Alfred, despite his being a potential adventurer, bears the marks of the refined, neoclassical hero who prefers debating to quarrelling, who is more intent on creating Empires than destroying them. The poem of Alfred abandons the intention of telling a coherent action altogether. Alfred mainly talks, watches and contemplates. Political wisdom and responsibility replace the more spectacular qualities of martial valour. He is not the centre of things, he is a quiet observer and only occasionally takes part in some action to counter-balance the monotony of discussion. The fight with the panther, the accounts of the battles against the Darans and the Moors are such active episodes, but they are few, accidental and not subservient to a general plot.

How detrimental to the story these political deliberations are, becomes even more obvious when a poet leaves those scenes of comparative sim-

plicity which Blackmore was still able to describe in the case of his lonely wanderer, and ventures upon a subject of recent history. Historical knowledge and complexity compel the author to present a panorama of enormous width and depth, the more so as the epic unity had, according to current opinion, to consist of a historical transaction in its entirety, and not of a personal adventure of the hero within it. The more important, the more far-reaching and universal this transaction was, the more spectacular and grand it became in the eyes of the classicists, although from the poetical point of view, they should have objected that in proportion to the universality of the action still less space could be given to the individual actor; that historical details would necessarily usurp much of the space which should have been devoted to individual acts, looks, gestures, disputes. They should also have been aware of the circumstance that the larger the epic stage became, the more likely it was to fall apart into numerous separate and distant scenes of action, and that it thereby lost in concentrated power and passion more than it gained with its apparent historical momentousness. The omnipresence of the authentic hero tends to be lost in the modern neoclassical epic. *Eliza* and *The Revolution* are particularly illustrative of this kind of narrative dissipation. They both treat subjects of modern history and pride themselves on encompassing vast political and geographical spaces. The epic stage of *Eliza* is England, the Netherlands, Spain and Italy; that of *The Revolution* England, Ireland, Holland and France, and the movements of the opposed forces are directed by people who, even more than Arthur, of whom Blackmore says that he is laden with "the Cares of Empire"²¹, can no longer get away from their administrative duties. They are confined to what in the army slang of modern times is frequently called 'desk-jobs', and therefore rarely or never meet eye to eye on the field of action. Whatever action there is can usually only be described in a few words and without reference to individual characters. The hero's preparation for the war against James, for instance, in consequence of the vast amount of historical material which has to be packed into the poem, is not described as labours performed by certain people, but as a fait accompli, summarily mentioned by the poet, and connected with the hero's personality only in the sense that he is declared to be the motive power behind it. As a physical factor, he is non-existent. The result is this:

*Money, the nerve of war, must be amass'd,
To bear the charge of armaments so vast;
An influx late, of Protestants, from France,
When Lewis cancell'd the decree of Nanth;
The great increase of trade, in Holland late,
With well-fill'd chests, the treasures of the state;*

*Favour his view, in secret to acquire
 Vast sums, agreeable to his desire.
 Ships built, or bought, to various parts are sent,
 That none may form a guess of his intent;
 Troops to Nimengen march, as if alone,
 Destin'd to cover, and protect Cologne;
 Here, warlike stores collected, ev'ry way,
 Arrive by land, or water, night and day;
 These stow'd, when darkness' most his purpose screens,
 Form for his armaments, the magazines ...
 Most studious, that deceiver [the pope] to deceive,
 He caus'd the Roman Pontiff to believe,
 That all the preparations which he made,
 With so much diligence, and no parade,
 were aim'd at France, when shortly from the Rhine,
 He would an army of the Empire join;
 The Pontiff hence, from enmity to France,
 Furnish'd large sums, that project to advance,
 Which in the sequel were employ'd alone,
 To chase a Popish convert from the throne²².*

In the same fashion, Eliza's preparations for the defence of the British Isle are described. Thus the story of the poem, monumental as it is, fails to be alive with movement. It becomes dry, prosaic, because it is uninspired by individual feeling.

The tendency towards the monumentalization of events instead of that of the hero's individuality is a characteristic sign of the epic decline. Since the poet cannot depict his abstract hero as an eminently active personage, he seeks to replace the vanishing grandeur of the individual by the singularity of events and scenery which are meant to stagger the reader with their imagined dramatic power. The easiest escape into the spectacular is that into the marvellous; the eager vindication of the marvellous in the eighteenth century was undoubtedly a result of the justified fear that without it the epic splendour would get tarnished in the self-denying person of the hero. Heaven and Hell—once they were accepted as legitimate elements in the epic structure—seemed to afford the eagerly sought-for escape into the poetically tangible grandeur of action and environment, and the poets made ample use of them despite the inevitable consequence that these scenes usually were isolated, self-contained episodes bearing no relation to the story of the hero. Nevertheless the poet believed thus to preserve the fabulous character of the authentic epic even in poems treating subjects of recent history. Endeavours of this kind are the story of the fall of Lucifer recounted

by Prince Arthur²³, his account of the Creation²⁴ and of the Last Judgement²⁵, the many turbulent councils of the hellish peers throughout the history of the eighteenth-century epic, the incantations and spells of Merlin, the sorcerer²⁶, described at length like those of Superstition and of the Lapland witch in *The Revolution*²⁷. Then there are the animated and terrifying descriptions of hellish beings such as Bellona, the fury²⁸, the monsters of the forest of temptation²⁹, the fiend of pestilence³⁰. The monotony of the war on earth is believed to be enlivened by Spenser's song of the war in Heaven³¹, by the mirage of a battle between angels and devils above the horizon with the Saxons and Britons looking on aghast³², or by the tremendous fight of Britannia against Moloch³³. Another method of recapturing the grand simplicity of the authentic epic is that of describing figures and scenes on swords, shields, banners; Homer, in describing the armour of Achilles, depicts what happened or could easily have happened at that time. It is a picture of contemporary civilisation he presents with his descriptions. The classicists used the same device in order to describe what was past, and what could not well be said elsewhere. Thus Prince Arthur's sword is the pretext to record a long string of miraculous biblical events³⁴. In *The Revolution*, similarly, the old splendour of a hero becomes visible to the reader not in the real action of the poem, but on a scarf, on which scenes from William's life appear embroidered, "all too glorious to behold³⁵". There he is seen in that largeness of action and gesture, which his own time is no longer at leisure to indulge in. There the people of liberated towns hail him as their deliverer, marching to meet him before the walls of the city, he himself able to curb the enthusiasm of the multitude with a modest gesture, pointing upwards to Heaven which in its turn suffuses him in an aureole of divine light. Or there, too, he is seen roused to martial fury at the misdeeds of oppressors. Another method still of adding to the dramatic volume of the poem is to describe outstanding events which really did happen or could have happened, such as violent storms and shipwrecks (in fact too numerous to list), or, more concretely, the disaster of the Spanish Armada³⁶, the macabre beauty of Drake's burning ships being driven amongst the Spaniards³⁷, fireworks in the nightly sky over London³⁸, the eruption of Mount Etna³⁹, the eclipse of the sun⁴⁰, the English ship ramming the boom laid across Derry Harbour⁴¹, and many other happenings indeed of quite a spectacular, but equally impersonal, nature.

This impoverishment and exhaustion of the traditional epic as a narrative telling the story of great character was final. The indispensable unity or harmony of action, character and environment, lost in the process of rejuvenating the species, was not to be retrieved within the bounds of what we have seen to constitute the specifically eighteenth-century conception of the epic.

6. AN EPIC POEM 'ON A NEW PLAN':
WILLIAM FALCONER'S 'SHIP WRECK'

It may be thought irrelevant to close this history of the eighteenth-century epic hero with a poem that in its subject, its lack of amplitude and heroic intention falls short of the most modest requirements which the classicists had ventured to put forward for an epic poem 'on a new plan'.

And yet, with its mixture of tradition and innovation *The Ship Wreck* is the poem which is perhaps best suited to exemplify the evolutionary forces that were active behind the cautious formalism of the legitimate epic, and that foreshadowed the imminent breaking up of heroic poetry proper. It touches on all the problems raised in the course of this study, and we may therefore say a few words about it in lieu of a summary.

First, the story of the poem according to the third version (London 1769):

(I) The poem tells of the fate of the *Britannia* and its crew doomed to get shipwrecked in a storm. For three years the ship has been sailing the high seas with good fortune. It is now on its way from Egypt to Venice and expected to return in due time to its native English harbour. For several days it is held up off the Greek coast by a treacherously calm sea; a short respite for the ill-fated vessel. The poet's lament of the decayed grandeur of ancient Greece enhances the mood of evil foreboding. The chief members of the crew are summarily characterized, amongst them Albert, the captain, a valiant and cunning seaman, good-hearted and much attached to his family; Arion, the first mate, a youth of eighteen, adventurous and romantic, and Palemon, the 'hero' of the poem, handsome and noble-minded, yet sad of heart. On an excursion into the adjacent valley of Lethe he relates the melancholy story of his voyage to Arion, in whom he has found a faithful friend: Palemon's father, a rich merchant, had one day sent him to Albert, captain of the *Britannia*, to settle some matter of business. At Albert's house he had met Anna, the captain's lovely daughter, and the two young people had soon fallen in love with one another. Palemon's proud and arrogant father, disapproving of his son's attachment to the poor seaman's daughter, had tried to prevent their meeting and, failing in this, had sent him away on this long voyage to make him forget the girl. However, the years had not altered his heart, and love unfulfilled had made his journey a sad and bitter one.

Now, on the eve of their returning home, he is being tormented by the thought that he may never see the girl again; in a disturbed slumber he sees himself waving to Anna who is looking out for him from a high cliff when, suddenly, he is hurled back into the sea and drowned.

At midnight they weigh anchor; the nautical procedures and the ship itself are described in detail.

(II) The second canto gives an accurate account of the rising storm and of the manoeuvres executed by the crew to meet its increasing violence. The ship nevertheless suffers badly. The mainsail is rent, a spare one is fitted in the midst of the uproar. Four sailors are swept overboard by a flood-wave; the mizen is wrenched away by it and remains dangling over the side. The crew throw the guns over to relieve the storm-tossed vessel. The pumps are brought into action and worked till the men are exhausted. The captain takes a new bearing and realizes to his dismay that they are in the neighbourhood of the dangerous cliffs of Falconera. He orders rafts to be prepared and encourages the crew. They cut away the mizen.

(III) The hopeless labours of the crew are contrasted with the glorious events of antiquity which took place on those shores, off which the doomed ship is running before the wind. The tempest, accompanied by rain, hail, thunder, and lightning, has reached its height. As the second day dawns, the ship approaches the island of St. George, broadside to shore. The bowsprit, the foremast and the main-topmast are carried away by the storm. The ship strikes a rock and splits asunder; the captain and his crew are drowned. Arion and Palemon only, clinging to pieces of wreckage, are washed ashore. But Arion is the only one to survive. Palemon, the unhappy lover, his body crushed by fragments from the wreck, can utter no more than a few painful sentences lamenting his untimely death and the cruelty of his father, and dies in the arms of his friend.

The eighteenth-century epic evinces the poet's desire to improve on the classical models, which means that he wants to give tradition a new turn without entirely destroying it; he uses traditional devices in order to tell of 'things unattempted yet in prose or rhyme'.

Falconer's poem documents this attitude at an advanced stage. He prides himself on his plan to sing of scenes "to fame unknown, and new to epic lore"¹. But he introduces his new subject with due respect and reverence for the old masters. He traces it back to their works when he reminds us that

*Full oft! indeed, that mourning harp of yore
Wept the sad wanderer lost upon the shore*².

Yet having thus related it to the mythical source of epic poetry, he can now specify his new plan: In the poems of the ancients the drama of shipwreck was merely episodic,

*O'er that scene th' impatient numbers ran,
Subservient only to a nobler plan*³.

He now proposes to abandon that nobler plan, the fortunate ending of the epic, and to make the shipwreck and the fate of the people involved in it the central issue of the poem. For the first time since Milton, a writer with

epic pretensions again ventures to 'change these notes to tragic'. The originality of his subject entitles him to say that for him

*in vain the bold Maeonian lyre
Awakes the numbers, fraught with living fire⁴;*

the purpose of his theme is one "Which nor Maeonides nor Maro knew⁵".

In this manner the contrast between old and new is on several occasions used to open up the narrow and unheroic sphere of experience into the wider spaces of the epic past. But the rupture between that past and the poet's own days is final; it is only made to enhance the acute feeling of the transitoriness of all things worldly which dominates the story of the poem. The cities and fields where "lovely Helens", or "fair Penelopes", or "th' avenging chiefs of Greece" had lived, "Now lie in ruins, in oblivion lost⁶!". In this manner Falconer succeeds in avoiding the neoclassical discrepancy between the traditional raw material and its altered purpose in the modern epic. The characters of his poem are contrasted to, instead of precariously identified with, those of heroic poetry.

Most critics of *The Ship Wreck* look on these classicising elements as signs of the author's incapacity to free himself entirely from the literary taste of his age. Such criticism, however, is irrelevant. The literary epic has always shown itself conscious of its classical models, even where it does not strictly imitate them. If Falconer related his poem to classical precedents, he did it, not because he was an eighteenth-century poet, but because he wanted to be epic. It is for this reason that he invokes Homer or Virgil, or uses the classical device of commencing his story 'in medias res', reverting to the beginning through the subsequent report of one of the actors of the poem. It was a fortunate coincidence that the shipwreck actually took place in the neighbourhood of those famed regions, because it enabled the poet to remain true to his experiences and yet to introduce his heroic reminiscences without doing too much violence to his subject. The three versions of the poem show a distinct tendency on the part of the author to cast his subject into a form more strictly epic.

But this tendency did not interfere with that of executing 'a new plan', the most unheard-of aspect of which was the introduction of a really new hero. Whereas the other poets had tried to improve the Homeric pattern without forfeiting the hero's martial status, Falconer made bold to follow those critics who had condemned the heroic personage as no longer suitable for an epic poem. The merit of his venture is of course somewhat lessened when we remember that it was by the circumstances of his life rather than by poetic intuition that he was driven to decide on his theme; nevertheless it represents a significant event in the story of the verse narrative.

Falconer introduces his new hero in conscious contrast to the epic warrior:

*No pomp of battle swells th' exalted strain,
Nor gleaming arms ring dreadful on the plain?*

His leading character is a man of the poet's own time, belonging to the sphere of everyday life. He is the son of a merchant and on that account far too inconspicuous for heroic action in the conventional manner. As a consequence of his comparative anonymity, the visible choric action of the eighteenth-century epic, the cause, disappears, and with it the leader of large masses of people united in a common purpose. The Gods of heroic poetry, too, lose their relevance since there is no practical universal issue at stake in connection with a life which is accidental in its occurrence and uncreative in its energy. The hero has altogether relinquished the hierarchical eminence which the missioned warrior-statesman of the legitimate epic possessed.

The new kind of individuality or poetical eminence which the hero of *The Ship Wreck* represents, is based on what we might call his supreme loneliness in a memorable event. Just as Milton's First Parents or Defoe's Crusoe, though plainly human, gain in amplitude by the very isolation of their existences and by the events that characterize them, thus the fate of Falconer's Palemon is consummated in the Adamite or Robinsonic isolation of the epic stage as represented by the doomed ship. His grievance, common enough and unspectacular as such, is monumentalized and turned into dramatic action by the violence of the event, the shipwreck.

In this manner the Miltonic theme of the change of man's fortune under the impact of Providence or of inscrutable fate has again become the subject of the epic, and thus the true epic purpose of representing in an individual case the choric problem of the eternal contradiction between fate and the will of man is revaluated by Falconer, if only in a modest degree. The question is not extended to the depths of complex character, the question of guilt is not touched upon, it is rather the theme of virtue in distress. But the distress is not of a transient nature; the frustration and defeat of the hero—who is basically a good man—are final and incompatible with the laws of poetic justice. In the sad outcome of the story Falconer asks the honest question whether such events are not perhaps denials of "sacred justice⁸", and he does not answer it. He comes to the conclusion that there is no guarantee of virtue being rewarded, that "all thoughts of happiness on earth are vain⁹". With this outcome, Falconer relieved the epic of its password of admiration and replaced it by pity, or compassion.

But the patterns of innocence and virtue which hero and heroine still represent, and which are meant to heighten the tragedy of their lives, are not in themselves active and dramatic enough to afford sufficient epic scope. Falconer, in fact, did what most other poets had to do when faced with the

gradual loss of spectacular action in their poems: he took refuge in the grand impersonal event as a means of preserving the grandeur of the epic scene. The larger part of the poem is taken up by such an impersonal event, by the shipwreck, because it alone possessed the vehemence and largeness of catastrophe which was necessary for expression in heroic verse. Without this event the story of Palemon would be prosaic, without the touch of the extraordinary, of insufficient length to sustain a long poem. The very triteness of the new hero as an active personage in the epic sense drives the poet to escape altogether into the dramatic largeness of the shipwreck, and to make it the central feature of his work. From the hero's point of view, the shipwreck is merely the last, fatal episode of a long string of events, the fatal climax of his unhappy love-story. But owing to the stress laid on this episode, it becomes in reality the story of the poem, the ship its hero, and the story of Palemon an episode which happens to be linked to the disaster of the ship.

As an epic representing the clash between man and destiny, therefore, it is unsuccessful, it is patchwork. The human element is a mere corollary of the central event which is primarily impersonal. The first version of *The Ship Wreck* (1762) testifies to this fact because there the story of Palemon does not yet exist; the poem is merely the lively account of the loss of the ship and of the death of its nameless crew. The author is clearly a seaman who talks about ships and about the sea because he loves them both at heart. The tragedy of love is only an after-thought, added in the second and third versions in connection with the poet's desire to give his work a more distinct epic semblance. Thus the first version, being the artistically purer, yet less epic one, reveals once more the symptoms of the decline of epic poetry.

Falconer's poem contains many an aspect which is already evident in Milton's *Paradise Lost*, and we can now go back to this last successful modern epic and assess its position in comparison with what was going on for more than a century after its appearance.

The Hero of 'Paradise Lost'

I. 'PARADISE LOST' AND ITS SIGNIFICANCE IN THE HISTORY OF THE EPIC

It is only with the problems and achievements of the eighteenth century in mind that we can appreciate the position of *Paradise Lost* as the nodal point in the history of the English epic. Milton could have written a poem in the prevailing Renaissance spirit which already contained all the elements of what is later called neoclassicism. We know, of course, that this had been the primary intention of the poet. If we compare his intermittent pronouncements on the subject of his intended epic with eighteenth-century theory and practice, we are struck by the identity in them of mood and intention. His "heroasque pios, semideosque duces"¹ of the sixth *Elegy*, his Arthur breaking "the Saxon phalanxes with British war"², his national hero as "one of our victorious kings" and "pattern of a Christian hero"³ are all, we perceive, fundamentally akin to the poetical personages of the neo-classical epic; they represent the legitimate ideal warrior-statesman.

A profound poetic instinct which seems to have anticipated the abortive development of the epic for nearly centuries to come, prompted Milton to abandon this project. In the light of what we know about the epic of the eighteenth century we may not be called presumptuous in supposing that only by virtue of his superior poetic language could the execution of his work have differed from the worn-out pattern set by the subsequent generations of epic writers. Even if he had adapted the type of Spenserian romance, as C. S. Lewis suggests, he might not have contributed to the history of the epic in such an eminent way.

The fact remains that Milton did not finally accept these patterns. That it happened with a thought of the epic crisis is proved by his hint that he may be writing in "an age too late"⁴ for celebrating physical heroism. The gradual narrowing of the epic spaces to the solitary walk, from Paradise, of Man unadorned and prosaic, heralded an essentially new epic spirit. The significance of this process has escaped poets and critics alike for centuries. Milton was able to rely on the heroic tradition because he depicted it in its process of devaluation. The plan is so magnificent that he once more succeeded in appearing heroic against his ultimate intention. For the same reason *Paradise Lost* deceived the subsequent writers of epic poetry about the real state of its imminent disintegration; the very ingenuity of the

disguise in which Milton hid the degradation of Man down to the point where he might continue his pilgrimage as a Robinson, or Tom Jones, prevented the poem from asserting itself as the real turning point of epic literature and allowed it to be looked upon as still tolerably traditional, even though it was felt to be different from that tradition in many respects. This middle position between tradition and apparent revolution accounts for the failure of criticism to see *Paradise Lost* as an integral stage in the organic evolution of the literary species to which it belongs. It is usually looked upon as an exotic growth of singular beauty without deeper interdependence with the fate of the species as such. It is simply its being different which is accepted, without any urge to examine the reasons for its being so. It takes up a peripheral position in the history of the epic, because it is a work of genius standing by itself and apart from the common track. The attitude is very old; Dennis—echoing Dryden— calls it a “most irregular Poem⁵” because it is “so very different from what Homer or Aristotle ever thought of⁶”: Addison’s criticism, too, being directed towards instating *Paradise Lost* as an epic comparable to that demanded by Aristotle’s interpreters, evidently overlooks its more interesting character as an un-neoclassical poem. Gildon dissociates it from the problem of epic evolution by classifying it as belonging to a separate “new species⁷” and, like hosts of other critics, by granting the name of epic to the works of Homer and Virgil only⁸. This curious feeling of detachment towards *Paradise Lost* is by no means a characteristic only of the first few decades following the publication of the poem. The history of the fame and influence of *Paradise Lost* on English poetry time and again reveals this critical incapacity to see in the poem more than an isolated, self-contained shrine of sublime beauty. Especially in the eighteenth century, Milton’s influence as an epic poet exhausts itself in the praise it engenders. We know that although “critical admiration of Milton was somewhat tempered in the early period by the judgment that his poems failed to conform to the neoclassical rules of poetry⁹”, *Paradise Lost* was nevertheless one of the poems in English literature which, almost from the day of its publication, was the object of unrestrained and enraptured praise. We know that even in the eighteenth century it gave rise to a discussion the intensity and favourable tenor of which have never been equalled since. The caprices of people like Bentley or Lauder are merely exceptions to the rule and cannot dull the panegyric note struck by Dennis towards the end of the seventeenth century. R. D. Havens, in his gargantuan volume on the subject, gives an impressive catalogue of poems containing Miltonic borrowings, amongst them most of the epics listed in this thesis. The evidence seems so compelling in its sheer bulk that we are inclined to say with Tillyard that indeed “no epic writing in English after him [Milton] could escape his influence¹⁰”.

This is, however, an erroneous theory. The English epic did escape his influence. Whatever sounds or looks Miltonic in the neoclassical verse tale, does not really touch on the essence of Milton's new type of epic. His heroes in conjunction with his art of converting traditional epic devices to completely new purposes, his art of saving the epic in spite of his ultimately unepic theme, did not affect subsequent epic writing. Always *Paradise Lost* remains an incident without a consequence; something which nobody would have missed in this particular form if it had not been written, something unconnected with broader necessities. Once it was there it could be enjoyed immensely, but it did not induce any poet or critic eventually to deviate from the rutted track of the legitimate epic. The journey through *Paradise Lost* was that along a strangely haunted by-way from which one turned back again into the highroad with a pleasant memory.

It may appear from these remarks that the position of the poem in the process of the epic crisis is one which is quite independant of the problems adumbrated by the eighteenth-century epics. But this is not the case. The connections and affinities between the neoclassical epic and *Paradise Lost* are many. But they are not in the first place those of subject matter and style, and they are not deliberate; they lie in the respective endeavours to solve the question of what a modern epic should be. The wide gulf between the two kinds of epic is merely that of different solutions to the same problem and, of course, that caused by an obvious disparity of poetic genius. We shall see that against the background of the neoclassical epic, which conveniently reveals the symptoms of the decline because it lacks Milton's masterly touch, *Paradise Lost* gains a good deal of relief in its importance, no longer as a singular event, but as an integral part of the history of the declining epic.

The circumstance which makes *Paradise Lost* at once something different from the neoclassical pattern and yet only another manifestation of the crisis, is Milton's choice of hero.

2. THE 'HEROES' OF 'PARADISE LOST'

It is a quality in great writers to think ahead of the time in which they are writing. In view of the fact that already in the late seventeenth century Blackmore's work was showing distinct signs of the epic decline, it is certainly not coercing Milton when we say that he, as the incomparably greater writer, must have been acutely aware of that impending decline even if he wrote a few years earlier than the royal physician, and that he chose a basically unheroic theme because he knew that a heroic one would fail him. Already Johnson in the heyday of neoclassicism interpreted Milton's enig-

matic "age too late¹" as expressing "some fear that his book is to be written in an age too late for heroic poesy²". This is a circumstance that raises the meaning of the unheroic qualities in *Paradise Lost* beyond mere personal dislike of war (as expressed in Milton's famous confession not to be "sedulous by Nature to indite Warrs³"); it reveals at once that Milton is aware of the endangered situation of the heroic poem as a species. Thus the choice of his subject, resulting in something so unlike the eighteenth-century epic, in fact springs from the same conditions that reduced the warrior-hero ad absurdum, whenever he was called upon as the leading character of a poem. The idea that the significance of *Paradise Lost* is centered in its heroic constituents is untenable. If Milton had seriously entertained any such idea, he would have remained faithful to his Arthur and not, with the theme of the Fall, have bought a meagre amount of heroism at the expense of a wealth of material utterly devoid of it. Let us remember this when we speak of the 'hero' of *Paradise Lost*.

Who is he, then? In a thesis dealing with the history of the epic hero we cannot well avoid this question, although in the case of *Paradise Lost* it is unfortunately one that, owing to its argumentative treatment in criticism, seems to have grown far beyond the stage of being answerable.

The question of the hero is insolubly linked with that of what the poem means, what it is about, and varying according to a considerable range of probable and improbable interpretations of the 'real theme', different characters have been called upon to represent the 'real hero'. He has been said to be God, Christ, Satan, Adam, Adam and Eve, and Milton; also he has been declared non-existing.

It is advisable not from the outset to base our answer on any of those highly subjective and speculative modern theories as to the subconscious value of the actors, although the most fascinating and fashionable critical approach to *Paradise Lost* since Blake is that of modernizing its metaphysics by pointing out what Milton must have meant, although he never went as far as to say it. In other words, it is misleading to search for the hero on the assumption that behind its religious fervour *Paradise Lost* is as much meant to justify the ways of Man to God, to signify the glory of rebellion against what destines, to imply moral victory of Devil and Man over the tyrant God in despite of outward defeat; in short, that the sublime mask hides an abyss of ultimate doubts bordering on the blasphemous. No student of Milton's character can seriously find fault with the conception that the poet first and foremost meant what in the invocation he professed to sing, that irrespective of possible undertones of grudge and frustration—which may well be there without stultifying the proposed theme—his theodicy has to be accepted as an unconditionally positive and not ironic one. Thus forewarned let us look at the various propositions concerning the hero of *Paradise Lost*.

The idea of the theodicy, of justifying the ways of God, would appear to put the case for the Omnipotent as the central figure of the poem. In a way he is. He is the accused whose triumphant 'not guilty' is worked out in that chain of events which actually constitutes the Aristotelean unity of the epic. Knowing how much importance the classicists attached to God in their poems as the highest possible object of admiration, we must not underrate Milton's preoccupation with him as an epic figure, the more so as he represents him as visible light and audible voice, and particularly because against all apparent odds, he is also turned into a dramatic figure by the free will of angels and Man, who thus have it in their power to injure what one would have thought to be unassailable.

But in this last contingency lies the argument against him. Quite apart from the fact that God's epic potentialities are absorbed and made ineffective in the abstract qualities of his High Decrees and in the scarcity of his entrances, he is nevertheless, in the last resort, the absolute, the unchangeable, whose temporarily dramatic position entirely depends on the doings of his subjects. Their free wills turn him into a mere looker-on. It is their responsibility to uphold the dramatic argument in its epic manifestation and therefore, poetically speaking, God is ruled out as the epic hero of the poem.

Christ, of course, has more initial chance for qualifying as epic hero. By force of his divine nature and active heroism Christ is a character so wholly congenial to the neoclassical ideal of the warlike saint that his nomination in that age was inevitable. In Christ Milton confesses himself to be a partaker of the neoclassical epic tradition, although he was wise enough not to make this type of character the only, indisputable centre of the poem. From our knowledge of the eighteenth-century epic we can much better understand the reasons for Addison's saying that if we "will needs fix the Name of an Hero upon any Person in it, 'tis certainly the Messiah who is the Hero"⁴⁷. Christ is not the Invisible one, but endowed with his ideality he responds spontaneously to God's call (as do Alfred, Arthur, Brutus, Leonidas and others) he is the tool of God's justice and despite his primarily spiritual greatness a tremendous fighter as well, thus commanding a maximum of admiration.

None the less, he cannot satisfy the conditions which we demand from the leading character of an epic. In Christ Milton places the neoclassical cause-hero distinctly at the circumference; the heavenly war is the only episode in which Christ is active, and it is furthermore utterly alien to his real, spiritual purpose. Christ committing violent slaughter is not the hero of Milton's argument. The struggle is fought out elsewhere. In addition to this, speaking in terms of epic economy, it is not he in whose doings the unity of action rests.

Nor is it Satan. And this is a point which we do well not to overlook when we come to him as the most illustrious of competitors for the title of

epic hero. The action of the poem does not come to its logical conclusion with the exit of Satan as the action of the *Iliad* does with the hero's anger finally appeased, or that of the *Odyssey* with the hero's vanquishing Penelope's suitors. Satan disappears in the vainglorious presumption of having defeated God, a state of mind which we know is not final at all. Yet Milton is content to leave him in this state of delusion, whilst the story goes far beyond this point to deal with matters not concerning him anymore as an epic figure. The alternative seems to be that either Milton was a bad craftsman, or that the real meaning is more likely to be centred in those characters whose story he brings to a poetically logical conclusion. From the point of view of artistic composition, Satan is decidedly not the hero.

But there is still another reason for styling Satan the leading character of *Paradise Lost*. Practically all critics of the Satanist school justify their preference in the belief that with his 'indomitable spirit', his 'proud martyrdom', his 'rebellious heroism' he represents a temperament which was emphatically that of Milton himself; that Satan was the mouthpiece of whatever Milton gloried in or suffered under. The affinity cannot be denied and is evidently there. Satan represents much of what in good men might have been turned to commendable purposes. But it is not enough to put him harmoniously in the centre. If Milton's chief concern had been to paint a picture of indomitable spirit, he would certainly have selected a hero in whom this spirit was joined with a positive purpose. It is unlikely that he chose the symbol of evil as the embodiment of 'man's purpose in the world'. Satan certainly symbolizes some of Milton's most urgent concerns, but in the first place he is Satan, and we cannot unreservedly say with Abercrombie that "it is in the figure of Satan that the imperishable significance of *Paradise Lost* is centred⁵⁷".

The fact that Satan is only part of Milton's activated ideology in the poem, and also the consciousness that the modern epic expresses much more than is expressed by the actors, has led critics to the conjecture that the poet himself stands in the focal point of the poem. Saurat is their most notable exponent. In his "Milton" he says that "in fact, there is in 'Paradise Lost' a greater character than Satan, an adversary of the Adversary. The hero of 'Paradise Lost' is Milton himself⁶⁷". The eighteenth-century epic shows that this interpretation is not altogether unjustified. There, too, we noticed that the author is the omnipresent figure haunting the poem because he has an idea to divulge, a conviction to assert; he is the commentator who praises and rejects, elevates and crushes as an ultimate arbiter. It is that kind of 'personal intrusion' mentioned by Clark which is a characteristic of the modern epic. If we call Milton the hero of *Paradise Lost*, we must call Blackmore the hero of *Alfred*, Ogden the hero of *The Revolution*, and so on. But this is a method which would eventually hold good for any piece of

literature with a marked bias and is an insufficient criterion for literary criticism.

However, Saurat's proposition touches on the decisive characteristic not only of Milton's epic but also on that of the declining epic as such; for does not Saurat, in calling Milton the hero, focus his attention on a person whose problems are predominantly those of the mind and whose rank and epic splendour are nil compared with those of the legitimate hero?

And this brings us to Man as represented by Adam and Eve. In the first place they are the only human actors, and it is hardly a matter of doubt that the human interest mattered a great deal to Milton. They are unhampered by the 'tinsel trappings' of the convention which he rejects and thereby more genuinely stand for the type which Milton implicitly demands by ironically destroying that convention. Their struggle is one within themselves, a circumstance which is supported in its significance by the importance it assumes in *Paradise Regained* and *Samson Agonistes*; a struggle which is not fought out with arms. The choric character of *Paradise Lost* is with more directness placed in the problem of Adam and Eve. Whether that problem still exists and interests us in the specific way in which Milton treated it, does not impair the validity of the issue, and to shift the stress to different and subconscious aspects merely for the reason that we today cannot justify the ways of God to men in the same manner, is a weakness rooted in the profound antinomy of our own modern consciousness.

It is self-evident, however, that in the discussion of the hero a considerable number of objections can and must be raised against Adam and Eve as heroes because, admittedly, they are not comparable to those of the heroic tradition, they are not even convincingly epic. To stop short at this point, however, is to say that traditional heroes were still possible. To make this objection without specification is confessing ignorance of what was happening to the heroic species at that time and of what Milton wanted to do with it. Again, the peremptoriness of such objections in the eighteenth century is understandable. Addison's caution in calling Adam and Eve "principal actors?" in distinction to the 'hero' Christ is a very gentlemanly way of venting dissatisfaction with the circumstance that there was no "principal agent endowed with the Character of heroick Virtue⁸" to oppose Satan, and that Adam was "by no means a Match for his Enemies⁹". Another objection, less understandable perhaps when it is brought forward in our own time, lies in the severe criticism passed on Adam and Eve as being devoid of human interest because of their manifest inactivity and passive paradisaical virtue. Their isolated position, taken at its face value, may have caused Johnson to say that "the man and woman who act and suffer are in a state which no other man or woman can ever know¹⁰", "the want of

human interest is always felt¹¹". Blair wishes Milton had "taken a subject that was more human and less theological¹²". Pattison, in our own century, echoes Blair in saying "had he, in the choice of subject, remembered the principle of the Aristotelean Poetic ..., that men in action are the poet's proper theme, he would have raised his imaginative fabric on a more permanent foundation; upon the appetites, passions, and emotions of men, their vices and virtues, their aims and ambitions, which are a far more constant quality than any theological system¹³".

If thus Adam and Eve are judged in terms of Homeric characters, if their remoteness, or apparent remoteness from our own way of life is made the touchstone for their positions as heroes, they, too, seem to fail their test. Apparently, Milton had chosen a story of very limited possibilities. He has been blamed for this fault by countless critics from Voltaire to Waldo¹⁴. Addison's remark that the epics of the past had "more Circumstances in them than the History of the Fall of Man¹⁵" is paraphrased in modern times by Clark who speaks of the "poetical jejuneness¹⁶" of the subject, by Raleigh who talks of the "intractable and barren nature of his theme¹⁷", by Hutchinson who blames its "narrow framework¹⁸".

If it is not possible to call Adam and Eve the heroes of *Paradise Lost*, do we have to accept Addison's verdict that "he that looks for a Hero in it, searches for that which Milton never intended¹⁹"? and to agree with Gildon who notices that contrary to the ancients "Milton begins his poem of things, and not of men²⁰"?, that is,

*Of Mans first Disobedience, and the Fruit
Of that Forbidd'n Tree²¹?*

If we interpret these remarks in the light of the epic crisis, they reveal an outlook of vast consequence. For Addison, *Paradise Lost* is an epic 'without a hero' in the same sense as for Thackeray, for instance, *Vanity Fair* is 'a novel without a hero'. For if Addison lightly calls Christ the hero for reasons of neoclassical taste, declaring at the same time that there is no hero at all, he implies that he is perfectly aware that neither Christ nor Satan stands in the very centre of the discussion, despite the fact that in their own ways they had the best claims for heroic status, and that consequently man only remains as the central figure. But he is a hero who does not deserve that name, because the conflict is not fought out in the open but in the soul of Man; his bearing as an actor is far less important than the meaning of what Gildon somewhat drily calls 'things'. As a craftsman Milton unmistakably tells us through the composition of his poem that Addison and Gildon are right.

The structural unity of the poem, the unity of action, rests on the adventures of Adam and Eve. Aristotle's 'one and entire action' is the creation

of Man in despite of Satan's rebellion, Man's fall, his expulsion from Paradise and his distant redemption by Christ through the grace of God. The picture of Satan lacks this conclusive pattern. We may add that Man's pivotal position is also expressed in his being the central object towards which the powers of Heaven, grown factious, direct their hate or love, a device as clearly derived from Homer as the technique of dramatic anticipation by which Adam and Eve are introduced. Long before they make their entrance they figure in the consciousness of the other actors as extraordinary beings, just as Odysseus does before he appears for the first time, or as Achilles does during the long period of his absence from the field. Even if we do not dogmatically decide on Man as the hero of *Paradise Lost* we are nevertheless obliged to view him more closely because Milton, the craftsman, tells us to do so.

The way in which Milton handled his story not only gives definite hints as to its chief actors but also more closely defines the preeminence and emotional quality of the central, unheroic theme. The expulsion from Paradise is the climax of the poem. Redemption is only a promise, a hope which Providence grants mankind, but it does not revoke the overwhelming impression that Adam and Eve are guilty of a sea of troubles surging upon mankind before that distant event. The appalling torture of Adam having to look at what is going to happen to mankind in the future owing to his fault, dwarfs his hope of redemption. We cannot blind ourselves to the fact that for Adam and Eve, life has ended in failure, that "the triumph of the good does not wipe out the tragic impression²²". The tragic climax makes Abercrombie's 'failure of living' the proper issue of the epic. Milton knew that his story had to end the way it does. The myth of the Fall, determined and unalterable in its chief components, prevented the story from developing at will under the poet's hands. That Milton nevertheless accepted the failure of Man as the final reality of the epic action renders it likely that he saw the chief character or 'hero' in him who through his deeds was responsible for this reality. With the decision of his free will to eat of the apple, Man takes this responsibility on himself.

But here the real difficulties only began. Even if we acquiesce in Milton choosing Man for his hero, the question is still undecided whether he also succeeded in representing him epically. If we look at this problem of 'failure of living' from the point of view of epic narration, or even from the point of view of heroic tradition, we realize that it would have been practically unmanageable in the traditional heroic figure. Since Milton conceives of his theme as a conflict of the soul which can only insufficiently be treated in direct action, all the cosmic splendour of *Paradise Lost* cannot decrease the ultimate importance of Milton's belief that "the mind is its own place²³", that Paradise is "within thee²⁴", or that "my self am Hell²⁵". The action is

less important than the spirit it symbolizes and we can see once more that Milton, in converting his idea into the material fabric of epic poetry, was confronted with the same difficulty that the classicists encountered: how can the soul be represented in epic action? Milton knew that no great legendary hero of British history could have enacted this tragedy of the soul without making his political, hierarchical and heroic attributes look accidental and irrelevant. It is Man unadorned who stands in the centre of *Paradise Lost* instead, the lack of external epic action being counterbalanced by a dramatic polarity within his own being or by the monumentality of his environment. Both the stress on intimate drama and monumentality of stage are two typical corollaries of the new, unheroic 'hero' of the modern epic.

Thus in the light of the history of the epic, the age-old praise of Milton as the cosmic bard appears as a fantastic fallacy. Justified as it is with regard to its poetical merit, it is nevertheless bestowed on that portion of the work which was only the condition for the introduction of the 'real theme', of what mattered more. It is obscuring the true momentousness of Milton's role in the history of the epic when praise of him exhausts itself in such eulogies as Marvell's "above human flight dost soar aloft²⁶", or Oldham's "Milton, whose Muse with such a daring Flight Led out the warring Seraphims to fight²⁷", or the "Athenian Mercury's" anonymous "mighty Milton walks thro' Paths untrod and sings of the ancient Wars of God²⁸", or Keats's "Old Scholar of the Spheres²⁹", or Raleigh's "to find him at his best we must look at those passages of unsurpassed magnificence wherein he describes some noble or striking attitude, some strong majestic action in its outward physical aspect³⁰".

This conception does not help us in the interpretation of *Paradise Lost*. The temptation to stop short of the ultimate concern of the poem for the sake of the compelling grandeur of its visible cosmic action is, of course, considerable and we may ask ourselves why Milton went to such great lengths in illuminating and glossing over the puritan simplicity of the principal actors by means of such dazzling splendour. The answer lies partly in what we have already said about Adam's and Eve's insufficient epic outwardness. But the problem of the epic crisis may give us more information about the relative values of central issue and poetical embellishment, if at this point we take into consideration what were the conditions which any fable or plot had to fulfil to make the treatment of Milton's ideas in epic form at all possible. What had the qualities of any fable to be to safeguard the continuation of a recognizably classicizing epic tradition in the face of its beginning devaluation?

The difficulties involved in the choice of subject were manifold, but for our purposes they will be sufficiently demonstrated by a few important examples.

The chief problem for Milton was the same as that for the eighteenth-century poets, the problem how to bridge over the widening gulf between the traditional epic raw material and his new unheroic theme. Since the failure of living was not to be treated in the figure of a famous hero for the simple reason that the merits of his heroism could not very well be perverted to serve directly opposite ends, Milton had to find a character whose name was as intimately associated with failure as that of great kings and commanders with heroism. The cause-epic was thereby eliminated. Now the difficulty arose whether it was at all possible to find a man who in spite of his unheroic and consequently extra-hierarchical status was famous enough to be known by every one, or at least by the majority of readers, and who was likely to provoke that instant association of tragic human failure. At the same time, and despite his weakness, he had also to be a person likable enough to be accepted as a 'hero' engaging our sympathy. In other words: he had to be as plainly human as possible, but in observance of a generally accepted rule he had also to be recognizably choric.

But from the point of view of epic representation this was not enough. Since the predominantly spiritual quality of the theme was likely to render plain unadorned man inactive over large parts of the story, it would be preferable to place such a character on a stage of sufficient epic largeness to counteract the monotony of his own movements, to counterbalance human pettiness by epic grandeur in the old style. But in order to establish such a simultaneity of epic largeness and spiritual argument it had to fulfil the condition of being natural, of logically forming a larger unity in the imaginative fabric of the poem; the grand stage should not merely be poetical accretion, a transparent epic excuse.

The classical device of epic machinery provided a possible solution for three important reasons. Firstly, because it was one of the best means by which the outward link between classical and modern epic poetry could be established; secondly, because the struggle of man against the forces of his destiny could best be explained by introducing the powers that destine, and thirdly, because the heavenly stage furnished at least to some extent the eagerly sought-for escape into the monumental. But the introduction of machines was not simply a matter of acceptance or rejection; the eighteenth-century poems prove that their presence rather confuses the human side of the issue. It was only acceptable if the mutual integrity of will was preserved, if man was capable of defying God, if the chances of success or defeat were equal. Only a dramatic relationship between the gods and man could render

Milton's theodicy at all tolerable. But since the divine actors had of course to be those of the Christian Revelation—no matter if they seemed to defy the idea of man ever being their equal opponent—Milton had to find a situation in which this dramatic constellation was nevertheless possible, commonly accepted, plausible, and not detrimental to God's reputation. However, there was still another condition: despite man's weakness the intercession of God on his behalf had to be justifiable. Man had to be important enough to provoke the anger or love of Heaven.

Now, all being done to make the poem resemble its great precedents despite the absence of a 'hero', there remained the necessity not to allow the grand epic contrivances to overshadow the main theme which was dramatic and spiritual. In other words, Milton had to employ these pageants with sufficient irony to imply their primary value as a means of telling a story nicely. The epic tradition had to be made use of in order to convey what was most unlike it. It is the epic crisis which is productive of the apparent paradox that Milton denounces war, knights, jousts, and tournaments in the opening lines of the ninth Book after having made use of them so liberally in the preceding books. Ogilvie's *Britannia* is only the most obvious manifestation of the same dilemma.

We can surmise from the problems above stated that if Milton found a fable that was not deficient in too many of those points, he was lucky. If he managed to avoid them all, it would be a unique fable indeed. In fact, it was unlikely that he could rejuvenate the species simply for the reason that the repertory of fables doing justice to the demands of the crisis was probably exhausted in this one attempt.

In view of what Milton was up against we cannot but call his choice of subject a masterly one. His theme is not barren, it is not intractable, it is not jejune; it is a source of poetic wealth uniquely suited to overcome a great number of difficulties which no heroic story would have overcome any more. We cannot judge the poet's choice as if it were possible today still to write another *Iliad*, another *Aeneid*. To measure *Paradise Lost* by Homer's poems without taking into consideration what conditioned, limited or enlarged their respective fables is untenable formalism. Under the circumstances, the advantages of Milton's plot far outweighed its drawbacks.

The characters who fulfil the requirements of the new epoch are Adam and Eve.

4. ADAM AND EVE AS EPIC 'HEROES'

The relationship of the new epic 'hero' to the cosmic dimensions of his environment and to the presences that haunt it, enhances the impression that *Paradise Lost* is not only the last possible epic in a truly classicizing tradition, but in itself a product of the epic crisis hiding under the uniqueness

of its theme, and the mastery with which it was handled by Milton, most of those potential dangers that in the eighteenth century led to failure.

Milton, in choosing the myth of the Fall, eliminated at one blow all the drawbacks that were inseparable from the figure of the warrior, and more particularly from the warrior-statesman, and gained an initial chance for a successful solution of the problems enumerated in the previous paragraph. The most compelling advantage was that the story of Adam and Eve harmoniously reconciled its meaning with that of the epic raw-material. The cosmic stage, Heaven and Hell, and particularly its centre, the world of Paradise to be lost, were directly and necessarily linked with the idea of the Fall, and Milton, therefore, had no need to describe a kind of pageantry which, as in the poems of the eighteenth century and all subsequent epics up to the *Idylls of the King* and *Sigurd*, was alien to the real purpose of the poem. Thus Milton found at his disposal a splendid epic scaffolding which seemed so natural and inseparable from the metaphysical quality of his chief argument that, far from having to be excused as mere embellishment, it naturally suggested itself as the appropriate theatre of action. In representing this grandeur Milton chose an approach which was different from that of the classicists. Whereas the latter chose a basically probable story and for reasons of epic representation rendered it improbable in the process of its idealization and monumentalization, Milton selected a basically improbable event, an event, however, which was an accepted myth and thus extended the probability of its own logic far beyond what the classicists could ever afford to make us believe. Thus the stage and the supernatural agents enabled Milton to describe naturally and lavishly what from the angle of a basically probable story he could not have described with the same liberality. He could also place man in such a magnificent environment that his simplicity could borrow additional lustre beyond his own resources. If in the last chapters about the eighteenth-century hero we have shifted the stress from the hero himself to the impressiveness of the epic stage and of the impersonal events which were to make up for the hero's insufficient epic appearance, it has been to prepare us for the fact that in *Paradise Lost* we already have that self-same escape into monumental impersonality. Just as in the eighteenth-century epics, a great deal of the splendour in Milton's poem is impersonal, descriptive of things, not of actions directly interpreting the theme or bearing on the immediate well-being of the chief actors. Aristotle's decree that whatever happens in an epic is to show us 'how it comes that we are happy or unhappy in our lives' is neglected as it had never been neglected in the authentic epic. The startling object replaces the startling personal activity. Our wonder is focused "on *matter* new to gaze¹", on "*things* invisible to mortal sight²". The great gulf between Hell and Heaven reveals spectacular pictures of visual beauty, such as Pandaemonium³, the Gate of

Heaven⁴, the Garden of Eden⁵, the created world⁶, the Highway through Chaos⁷, to name only a few instances, and it is to no little extent on these passages that the lasting impression of *Paradise Lost* is founded. The impression of epic largeness which is conveyed by the spacial dimensions and visual lustre of the stage is heightened by the great event of the war in Heaven.

If we are right in saying that Adam and Eve are the characters whose story is congruent with the Aristotelean unity of action and that therefore they are the 'heroes' of the poem, we must conclude that the war in Heaven is an event which is not directly connected with the chief actors of the epic. For Adam and Eve, the war is a tale they listen to; it is an episode which does not draw on their epic resources. If we look forward to the eighteenth-century epic, we notice once again that this situation is not unheard-of in the later period of the decline; is not, for instance, Eliza the heroine of her epic but Vere the man who 'acts'? Or is not Brutus the hero of *Britannia* but Locrinus the man who 'acts'?

The episodical value of the war in Heaven only escapes us if we merely look at what happens. If we do that, we can say little against the judgment that Milton, after all, was still a writer of heroic poetry. But the situation changes as soon as we ask ourselves why this action is related, to whom it is related and what it means. We then see that despite its dominating heroic outwardness it is not intended to celebrate heroic warfare. Milton only makes use of it to signalize its appalling end in the fall of the rebel angels. The fall as the consequence of the war—dismissed in the short description of their headlong flight through space—is, for Adam and Eve, more significant than what for reasons of epic spectacle is described in several books. It is to them that the story of the war is recounted, and the important thing for them is not the phantastic action which will never happen to them in the like manner, but the abstract possibility of the Fall. Raphael's admonition to persevere in obedience, "least the like befall In Paradise to Adam⁸", does not hint at the likeness of the event as such, but at the inevitable punishment in the case of disobedience. The rebellion and the war in Heaven—the conspicuous heroic traits of *Paradise Lost*—are a heroically embroidered warning, the war as such—from Man's point of view—is episodical. The same phenomenon appears again in the neoclassical epic where the meaning of war is far more essential than its heroic aspects.

But it is not only by such subtle means that Milton makes us feel that the physical reality of the epic events is inessential. He tells us that his true theme is something which cannot be represented with epic concreteness, that whatever appears in action is narrative transmutation of something ultimately intangible and unadornable. We remember, for instance, that Milton in connection with the war in Heaven makes Raphael complain that the task of describing the revolt is not only sad but also

*hard, for how shall I relate
To human sense th' invisible exploits
Of warring Spirits?*

and he makes him say that

*what surmounts the reach
Of human sense I shall delineate so,
By lik'ning spiritual to corporeal forms,
As may express them best*¹⁰,

or

*Thus measuring things in Heav'n by things on Earth*¹¹.

This means that not only are we to look on these events as hard to describe, but as actually different from what he tells us they are. Through Raphael Milton confesses that he does not literally believe in the event as he depicts it, but that in this manner he can be a lively and understandable storyteller. He frames Aristotle's convincing lie! The exquisite irony with which Milton labels his cosmic stage and events as epic devices and gives shape to things that "shape had none"¹², is unthinkable in a serious epic poet of the heroic tradition; it points to a man who knew how easy it had become to excite derision and how important it nevertheless was to make prudent use of the ancient legacy.

The ironic treatment of the grand stage and its actors throws us back again on Adam and Eve. Their seriousness is heightened by the circumstance that of them Milton does not speak ironically. Their reality also heightens the significance of their spiritual drama. We must not forget this element of reality that supports the eminence of Adam and Eve against the 'delineated' insubstantiality of Satan.

The choice of Adam and Eve satisfied a number of conditions which the eighteenth-century heroes were incapable of meeting. In them Milton found characters with whom the intended mood of his poem was intrinsically associated. Adam and Eve mean failure of living. Despite their simplicity of appearance, the egocentricity of their existence and the domesticity of their activities they were famous people. They had a universally acknowledged choric character, they were believed to have been able to frustrate God in his ideal creation and therefore allowed a dramatic relationship between them and destiny. They were important enough to activate the gods on their behalf. Adam and Eve possessed a singular kind of hierarchical eminence in their very isolation; they were indeed

*The onely two of Mankinde, but in them
The whole included Race*¹³.

Of course, there still remained the problem of epic representation. Just as the cosmic stage and event raise the narrowness of Paradise into epic dimensions, so the simplicity of the human actors had to be counterbalanced by an epic monumentalization of their fall.

This is where Satan comes in. His function is not only that of incorporating the enemy of Man. In the theological sense, of course, it is mainly that; we should wrong Milton if we denied the ultimately evil and damnable purpose of Satan. From the moral and from the dramatic points of view, indeed, "the situation of Adam and Eve in relation to Satan is an essential repetition of that of Othello, Desdemona and Jago,—innocence and love assailed and broken by a villain utterly evil and of superhuman ingenuity¹⁴". But from the point of view of epic economy he is also Man's ally. It is he who enables Adam and Eve to appear on the stage at all because their problem can be epically paraphrased by his own.

If we ignore the possibility of this paraphrase, that is, if we take this paraphrase as the main theme and concentrate on Satan as the epically more impressive figure, it is here that the temptation to make him the hero of *Paradise Lost* is greatest and perhaps also the justification for yielding to it. We must certainly ask ourselves whether in the face of such a similarity of theme in two dissimilar types of poetic personages, it is not more plausible to see the hero in him who represents the common theme more spectacularly, that is, Satan. Let us first look at these parallels and agree on the answer later.

The most obvious one is contained already in the title. The event of Paradise lost occurs twice. It is the grief both of Man and Satan and through them that of countless others in both camps. If Man has lost Paradise—so has Satan. Whether the blissful seat be Heaven or the Garden of Eden is a mere matter of outward circumstance.

Through the fall of Man, mankind is condemned to an eternity of suffering—so are Satan's followers,

*Millions of Spirits for his fault amerc't*¹⁵.

Only few of those tempted resist temptation—Abdiel represents them in the host of Satan.

Man had it in himself to rise victorious over the power of evil. He was

*Sufficient to have stood, though free to fall*¹⁶

So was Satan:

*Such I [God] created all th' Ethereal Powers
And Spirits, both them who stood and them who faild*¹⁷.

Man, if at all he can be excused, might plead that it was only through transgression that he was completely enabled to assess the real purport of his offence—so might Satan. They both seem by necessity blind to the

relativity in the merit of things. Both have to take God's omnipotence on trust. Their very transgression only enables them to realize that they should not have transgressed. Eve in front of the Tree cannot

*know to feare
Under this ignorance of Good and Evil,
Of God or Death, of Law or Penaltie*¹⁸.

Similarly, Satan speaks of God's "strength conceald, Which tempted our attempt¹⁹", for "what power of mind, Of knowledge past or present, could have fear'd" such dire consequences following on what to them seemed reasonable doubt.

Through his fall Man learns that he has overthrown the natural, rational, and divine order of things—and so does Satan.

The list could be augmented by more such parallels, and in each of them we are forced to concede that Satan impresses his version more forcibly on us than Man does because the circumstances of his rebellion and fall are not only dramatic but also magnificently epic. So far he has an unquestionable ascendancy over Man. We should find it difficult at this point to disprove that Satan is the hero of *Paradise Lost*. Satan expresses feelings and transacts deeds which as a complementary number of virtues or vices enrich and complete the picture of human nature. The question is how long this parallelism is valid in the story of the conflict between Man and Satan. Is it kept up throughout the poem or is it again dissolved?

It is in fact dissolved from the moment of Satan's conscious revenge. In the act of tempting Eve Satan commits his second offence. The real importance of this second offence lies in its being the first on the grounds of his acquired knowledge of good and evil. This offence is unpardonable. Through it Satan hardens into the evil principle, If Milton had sympathies for Satan in his first defeat, he certainly had none for Satan defeating Man. The moral condemnation of Satan destroys him beyond appeal as a real double of that kind of man that interested Milton in the last resort: man liable to err, but not through repeated blasphemy forfeiting the care of Providence and the hope of redemption. Satan's second offence makes the spotlight again swerve on Man.

Satan's poetical league with Man, then, having served its purpose of monumentalizing and complementing Man's less spectacular drama, is dissolved by the new relationship between Satan and Man as direct opponents. Saurat is wrong when he declares that *Paradise Lost* is "built round two great themes which are harmoniously balanced: the fall of the angels and the Fall of man²⁰". *Paradise Lost* is built round one great theme: the Fall of Man, epically paraphrased by that of Satan in order to raise it visibly to its universal meaning, and the consequences of that fall for Man. Satan, after

having been crushed morally and physically—and thereby also epically—in his consciously blasphemous second offence, is heard of no more. All the available space is now devoted to the simplicity of our First Parents and to their spiritual struggle. No doubt Bush is right in saying that the epic events in Heaven “had been only a macrocosmic illustration of and background for, Milton’s real theme, the war between good and evil in the soul of man²¹”.

But now the direct clash between Satan and Man conjured up a new difficulty. If so far Satan had been welcomed as a monumental copy of Man, he had now to be degraded to the lesser height of Man. The antagonism between Satan and Man could only be dramatic if they were equal opponents. In this, critics usually agree, Milton has failed. Milton criticism abounds with verdicts such as Addison’s, according to which Man is “by no means a Match for his Enemies²²”, or Saurat’s opinion that Man is no “fitting counterpart for Satan²³”.

Speaking in terms of heroic poetry, both Addison and Saurat, and with them hosts of other formalists, are perfectly right. As heroic fighters they would form an ill-matched pair. But this consideration is beside the point. We know by now that Milton did not want to write heroic poetry in that sense. To judge the issue on the grounds of such lingering traditionalism leads to the grossest misinterpretation. Judging the conflict by our own consciousness of man’s frail mortality, judging it by our foreknowledge of its result renders Man indeed hopelessly inferior to Satan. But this approach is illogical. Whether Man is an equal opponent for Satan must not primarily be decided by us, it can only be judged by what Satan knows about Man, with what means he can assail him and what he thinks of him as an enemy. If after these considerations Satan thinks it necessary to resort to his utmost ingenuity without having any guarantee of success, the dramatic tension is maintained, the struggle is equal, no matter if the result undeceives him. The solution for Milton, therefore, lay in his making Man a formidable adversary in the eyes of the Apostate, to make him an ideal person without, however, hiding his fallibility from our own eyes.

How does Man appear in Satan’s view?

Satan’s first knowledge of his opponent is gained from a rumour in Heaven, speaking of Man as

*A generation, whom his [God’s] choice regard
Should favour equal to the Sons of Heaven²⁴.*

When Man is discussed in the hellish council of the second Book, Beelzebub describes him as

*To be created like to us, though less
In power and excellence, but favoured more
Of Him who rules above²⁵.*

In the dispute with Death at the outset of his journey, Satan hints at the possibility that Man was "to supply Perhaps our vacant room²⁶" in Heaven. Sin rejoices at the prospect of dwelling in that "new World of light and bliss, among The Gods who live at ease²⁷". This is all Satan knows. At the start of his venture, then, Satan's conception of his opponent is that he is godlike, immortal, perhaps less powerful than himself but stronger in the end because protected by Heaven, and that he is great enough to assume the station he himself had taken before his fall. Leagued with Heaven, it was improbable that he should be dislodged by violence as Satan himself had been. Evidently, nothing could be more wrong than to call Man an unequal opponent. On the contrary, Man's position seems stronger than that of Satan. The Devil does not yet see how he can possibly overcome Man. A lesser character would have given up at this point.

This situation does not change after the first contact with Man. Satan's superiority which is in fact the useless, because inactivated, one of his physical, epic stature, plays no part in the struggle, though he "stood Like Teneriff or Atlas²⁸", though "His stature reachd the Skie²⁹". His heroic plus is nullified in the warning vision of God's golden scales and again in God's words that Man shall not fall by violence, "no, for that shall be withstood, But by deceit and lies³⁰". If we keep that in mind, Man's superiority increases rather than decreases. Satan, for the moment, knows that Adam and Eve are "exempt from wound, I not³¹". His significance as a hero is finally rendered ironical by his transformation into an animal. In contrast to the serpent Adam and Eve, as Satan himself sees them, appear in a splendour far excelling the wriggling Apostate. They are "Godlike erect", they seem "Lords of all",

*in thir looks Divine
The image of thir glorious Maker shon³²,*

they are "to heav'nly spirits bright Little inferior³³". There is no need to enumerate all the favourable impressions that crowd on Satan's view; the important thing is that to him they appear great, they "seemed³⁴" worthy. Their ideality as revealed to Satan makes them great and worthy foes for him. In this perspective Milton can indulge in the love of idealization with more justification than the classicists could, because it only formed one particular aspect of his chief actors, viewed from one particular angle. Milton's ideality is permissible, because in its potential downfall it is also tragic. This potential downfall is the only flaw which Satan can detect in the otherwise ideal picture of Man. But Man's weakness does not yet make him an inferior opponent. The same weakness has been, and is, also Satan's, and whereas he is already bent on evil, Man is still strong in innocence. Satan himself knows through the example of Abdiel that successful resistance against temptation is possible. Furthermore, since God expressly declares

that Man is capable of rejecting evil, there is proof enough that Man is capable of finally frustrating Satan in his one and only possible attempt to frustrate Man. Man, consequently, does not only *seem* an absolutely equal opponent for Satan, he *is* an absolutely equal opponent for Satan, or even superior to him in that he finally fights out the struggle in his own breast, with Satan little more than a passive bystander waiting for the result. Satan as an actor here ceases to be. If it had been technically possible, a gramophone record with the speech of temptation could have replaced Satan, or a pamphlet with the same text if Eve had been able to read it. The conflict has now become purely spiritual; in the scene of the temptation the *reductio ad absurdum* of Satan's greatness—and in him of the epic hero in the traditional sense—is completed.

As long as the Apostate had been on the stage, the deceptive ideality of Adam and Eve had served its purpose. If we turn to them as human beings, not as Satan saw them but as we know them, the situation is considerably changed. Milton's stratagem has deceived many a critic, particularly those of the eighteenth century, and remembering the neoclassical conception of the epic, we find it little surprising. For them, Adam and Eve before the Fall represented the unchanging lustre of man idealized, a state, it seemed, which was hardly comparable to that after the Fall. In a typical eighteenth-century writer like Addison, the fallacy of Man's ideality before the Fall manifests itself in the comment that there are "four distinct Characters in these two Persons. We see Man and Woman in the highest Innocence and perfection, and in the most abject State of Guilt and Infirmary³⁵", and that the two last characters are indeed unworthy of the epic muse. In our own days the same fallacy still persists, only it is productive of just the opposite opinion; Waldock writes that "Adam and Eve become characters only after the Fall³⁶".

Both interpretations are equally erroneous in their one-sidedness. To think of Man's state before the Fall as ideal is understandable. In the first place, existence in Paradise is naturally associated with ideality; if it were not we should have to ask what Paradise is at all good for. It also seems logical that only after the Fall could Man have become the 'mixed character' that is comparable to our own. Milton, far from despising ideality, did his utmost to create this impression in his turn and, apparently, he succeeded well in it. In the abstract Waldock is right and so is Addison by negative implication. But great artist that he was, Milton must have been aware of a weighty circumstance which rendered an absolutely ideal representation of Man quite impracticable. It may be best expressed by the Aristotelean principle of the consistency of character. If Adam and Eve were really four distinct characters as Addison would have it, Milton was guilty of the grossest inconsistency. But Milton was not only too wise to ignore this principle, he also

wanted to describe man as we know him. Milton did so despite the fact that here the story was against him. Adam and Eve had to be presented as corruptible beings with recognizably human characters even before the Fall. In view of Milton's insistence on free will this was inevitable, as logical deduction shows: When Eve plucks the apple, she commits an evil deed for which she is punished with incredible severity. Her free will should have told her to refrain from evil. Yet how can she make this decision if the knowledge of evil only becomes possible through eating the apple? The consequence would be that Satan is right when he presumes that Man only stands "By Ignorance³⁷". The consequence again of this would be that Eve cannot be said to be guilty, that God's ways to Man are absurd. Of course, this conception was incompatible with Milton's dearest concern: his belief in man's conscious responsibility. It was therefore imperative for him to depict Adam and Eve as possessing to a decisive degree that knowledge of good and evil before they are supposed to have it. Behind their seeming innocence he had to conceal the fact that the tree of knowledge of good and evil is in reality merely the tree of knowledge of the pain of punishment. Against the background of paradisaical ideality as a necessary anticlimax to the existence after the Fall, Milton makes Adam and Eve speak and behave as, according to a state in which they lack the perception of relative merits, they could not have spoken or behaved. Johnson is perhaps the first critic who noticed this in the instance of Adam replying to Gabriel's report. It is, he says, "the speech of a man acquainted with many other men³⁸", in other words, that he did possess that relative perception which according to the symbol of the tree he was only to obtain after the transgression.

What Johnson saw in one instance is in fact the characteristic of the whole poem. To point out all the moments before the Fall in which Adam and Eve appear as 'acquainted with many other men' would mean as much as to quote all those scenes in which they take part. Let us therefore look at a few typical ones only.

There is Adam musing on the tragic nearness of the Tree of Knowledge to the Tree of Life. "So neer grows Death to Life³⁹", he says with an audible sigh, and his remark reveals the consciousness of the sad potential reversal of his existence, as only we know it by the experience of other people's deaths. But this experience Adam is supposed to lack. Milton hastens to cover up the impropriety and makes Adam add "what ere Death is⁴⁰". But immediately he betrays himself and Adam's prelapsarian ideality again by making Adam further define this unknown quantity 'death' as "Som dreadful thing no doubt⁴¹". How can he call a thing 'dreadful' and shudder at the thought of it, if we are expressly told elsewhere that he does not know what dread or fear is? If he has no notion of the phenomenon 'unhappiness' in relation to 'happiness'? What good is Paradise if sadness

and fear of transitoriness weigh you down? Adam's lines—though in the first place unspeakable by really innocent Man—would have had to run like this: “‘So near grows death to life, whatever death is, some dreadful thing no doubt, whatever dread is’—so spake our general father sad, though sadness there was none” and so on. Clearly, the ideality of Man before the Fall, if insisted on, would have led to sheer absurdity of speech, or resulted in little more than complete silence for lack of reasonable vocabulary in Man's language.

Adam's injunction to Eve not to “think hard One easie prohibition⁴²” is a similar instance. The mere utterance signifies Adam's knowledge of hardness of thought and of its negative value. It also shows that he may secretly fear to yield to such thoughts and that he utters them as a kind of first warning to Eve. Real innocence would have rendered this forethought impossible and indeed unnecessary. Eve's answer that “what thou hast said is just and right⁴³” also presupposes a clear notion of what is unjust and wrong.

The most telling example of Man's precociousness is the account of Raphael's heavenly war. In it the Angel, for instance, talks of the ambition of Satan⁴⁴. Can Adam and Eve, never so far having had such a feeling, grasp the necessity of punishment for something which they cannot imagine? Raphael also talks of “rage⁴⁵”. How was Man to make sense of the word rage, having had no occasion whatsoever to get enraged? Raphael mentions the Devil's “fierce desire Of Battel⁴⁶”, and he does so before he has described that battle. How can Adam and Eve be impressed by such a mood, knowing neither what battle is nor fierceness? Raphael mentions the words mortal wounds and blood. How can Man be frightened at this, having no notion of the consequence of wounds, nor indeed of wounds as such, being immortal and ‘exempt from wounds’. What can therefore blood mean to them if owing to their very condition of being invulnerable they are sure never to have seen it? Raphael dramatically tells of the heroic stand of the rebellious angels who had “no thought of flight⁴⁷”. How can Adam and Eve admire courage? They would first have to know what fear is in order to assess the merit of a heroic stand, to say nothing of the fact that flight must have seemed purposeless in a being that could not suffer bodily harm. Raphael speaks of patience. What does it mean to Man who does not know impatience and, therefore, has neither the need nor the occasion to brood over the meaning of patience.

The list could be extended *ad libitum*. The ignorance of Adam and Eve before the Fall is not only questionable with regard to the qualities of the mind, but also with regard to objects and to phenomena of the senses. How can Adam and Eve be appalled by Raphael's mention of “thundering noise⁴⁸”, knowing no louder sound than that of their voices? What are they to make

of the angel's trumpets, of helmets, of Christ's chariot, or indeed of wheels, having never seen these things in their lives which, incidentally, are not quite four days old at the time of Raphael's story?

Raphael's words, at first sight absolutely new and meant to give Adam and Eve some prophylactic pictorial knowledge of good and evil, of fear and courage, of little and small, these words are somehow reminiscent of a twice-told tale. Not indeed as far as the specific action in Heaven is concerned, but as regards the associative technique of narration. It is quite obvious that Adam and Eve already know death; they know dread, injustice, wrong, hard thoughts, rage, fierce desire of battle, mortal wounds, blood, panic flight, impatience. They already know war, thundering noises, trumpets, chariots and wheels. What Raphael relates as a means of giving Man the faculty of comparison and conscious judgement is really only understandable if Man already has this faculty at the time of hearing the story. If he had not, the story of the Angel would be an incomprehensible riddle to him. In other words: it would be like talk about shades of colour to a man who has been blind all his life.

The 'real hero' is, I think, about to reveal himself. It would be wrong to speak of two completely independent strata of human consciousness in *Paradise Lost*. The characters of Adam and Eve before the Fall are deceptively represented as the world of Paradise makes us expect them. In reality—as a close examination of their behaviour will prove—our First Parents are endowed, even before the Fall, with the consciousness of ordinary people who have experienced the vicissitudes of a lifetime. The hero of *Paradise Lost* is not merely Man (Adam and Eve), but also man (everyman). (If he is, Satan at once becomes part of him in whatever is recognizably human in his character.) The real hero is one who possesses a range of experience which far outsteps that which we can grant him on the grounds of Adam's and Eve's isolated existence. The hero is man not as a mythical personage but such as he appears divested of his legendary peculiarity, freed from the encumbrance of his poetical embellishments. Only from such universal consciousness can Eve drop silent tears about a thoroughly beautiful dream, or provoke a domestic quarrel. Only from relative knowledge can Adam doubt the perfection of the creation or eagerly ask for more knowledge which, had his state been really happier than that happiness which *we* know, he would not have cared to obtain. Only as an ordinary man could he have felt his submission to Eve's charms as something disquieting, and only as such could he have decided for Eve against God even before the Fall.

What this means for the history of the epic is not too difficult to estimate. Milton raised a huge and splendid screen making thousands gaze at it. Behind it he stripped man naked. There we have the new epic spirit. To repeat the performance once more was so obviously beyond the reach of

the poets that followed or indeed of the time that followed, that we can understand its monumental loneliness amidst the infinitely lesser products of the epic crisis.

Yet the new spirit was revived elsewhere—in the novel of the early eighteenth century. All it had to do was to pull down the screen.

QUOTATIONS

I. THE PROBLEM OF THE DECLINE OF EPIC POETRY

- ¹ Clark, John: *A History of Epic Poetry*, Edinburgh/London 1900; p. 152.
- ² Abercrombie, Lascelles: *The Epic*, London 1914; p. 55.
- ³ Clark, op. cit., p. 11.
- ⁴ Bradley, A. C.: *The Long Poem in the Age of Wordsworth* (Oxford Lectures on Poetry), London 1909; p. 191.
- ⁵ Crabbe, George: *The Village* (Works, ed. A. W. Ward, Cambridge 1905).
- ⁶ Byron, Lord: *Don Juan* (Works, ed. E. H. Colderidge, London 1903), vol. VI/I/CC.
- ⁷ *ibid.*, I/III.
- ⁸ Moore, Thomas: *Letters and Journals of Lord Byron*, Francfort o. M. 1830; 6. 4. 1819.
- ⁹ Southey, Robert: *Joan of Arc*, Preface.
- ¹⁰ *ibid.*

II. TWENTIETH-CENTURY CRITICISM

- ¹ Tillyard, E. M. W.: *The English Epic and its Background*, London 1954; Preface.
- ² Gayley, Charles: *English Poetry*, London 1920; p. LVII.
- ³ Clark, John: *A History of Epic Poetry*, Edinburgh/London 1900; p. 62.
- ⁴ Bradley, A. C.: *The Long Poem in the Age of Wordsworth* (Oxford Lectures on Poetry), London 1909; p. 197.
- ⁵ Bowra, C. M.: *Heroic Poetry*, London 1952; p. 561.
- ⁶ Bowra, C. M.: *From Virgil to Milton*, London 1945; p. 16.
- ⁷ *ibid.*, p. 14.
- ⁸ Abercrombie, Lascelles: *The Epic*, London 1914; p. 95.
- ⁹ *ibid.*, p. 50.
- ¹⁰ *ibid.*, p. 39.
- ¹¹ *ibid.*, p. 46.
- ¹² *ibid.*, p. 51.
- ¹³ Wasson, D. A.: *Epic Philosophy* (North American Review, vol. CVII, Nr. 221), Boston 1868; p. 526.
- ¹⁴ Abercrombie, op. cit., p. 79.
- ¹⁵ *ibid.*, p. 92.
- ¹⁶ Clark, op. cit., p. 62.
- ¹⁷ *ibid.*, p. 55.
- ¹⁸ Bowra, op. cit., p. 31.
- ¹⁹ Abercrombie, op. cit., p. 94.
- ²⁰ Dixon, William M.: *English Epic and Heroic Poetry*, London 1912; p. 112.
- ²¹ Ker, W. P.: *Epic and Romance* (2nd edition), London 1908; p. 23.
- ²² Clark, op. cit., p. 65.
- ²³ *ibid.*
- ²⁴ *ibid.*, p. 47.
- ²⁵ *ibid.*, p. 48.
- ²⁶ *ibid.*, p. 57.
- ²⁷ *ibid.*, p. 31.
- ²⁸ Dixon, op. cit., p. 295.
- ²⁹ *ibid.*, p. 17.
- ³⁰ *ibid.*, p. 21.
- ³¹ *ibid.*, p. 38.
- ³² *ibid.*, p. 21.
- ³³ *ibid.*
- ³⁴ *ibid.*, p. 71.
- ³⁵ *ibid.*, p. 24.
- ³⁶ *ibid.*, p. 9.
- ³⁷ Clark, op. cit., p. 46.
- ³⁸ *ibid.*, p. 163.
- ³⁹ *ibid.*, p. 175.
- ⁴⁰ Tillyard, op. cit., p. 8.
- ⁴¹ Abercrombie, op. cit., p. 26.
- ⁴² *ibid.*, p. 39.
- ⁴³ Milton, John: *Paradise Lost*, IX/verse 14.
- ⁴⁴ Abercrombie, op. cit., p. 59.
- ⁴⁵ *ibid.*, p. 69.
- ⁴⁶ Bowra, op. cit., p. 32.
- ⁴⁷ *ibid.*, p. 17.
- ⁴⁸ Bowra, C. M.: *Heroic Poetry*, London 1952; p. 559.
- ⁴⁹ *ibid.*
- ⁵⁰ *ibid.*

⁵¹ Tillyard, op. cit., p. 120.

⁵² *ibid.*, p. 12.

⁵³ *ibid.*, p. 13.

⁵⁴ Bowra, C.M.: *From Virgil to Milton*, London 1945; p. 1.

⁵⁵ Dixon, op. cit., p. 101.

⁵⁶ *ibid.*, p. 279.

⁵⁷ Clark, op. cit., p. 178.

⁵⁸ Dixon, op. cit., p. 240.

⁵⁹ *ibid.*, p. 303.

⁶⁰ Abercrombie, op. cit., pp. 90-91.

⁶¹ *ibid.*, p. 88.

⁶² Clark, op. cit., p. 179.

III. THE NEOCLASSICAL THEORY OF THE EPIC HERO

1. *A Revaluation of the Neoclassical Conception of the Epic*

¹ Hamelius, Paul: *Die Kritik in der englischen Literatur des 17. und 18. Jahrhunderts*, Leipzig 1897; p. 97.

² *ibid.*, p. 186.

³ *ibid.*

⁴ Christiani, E. S.: *Johnson als Kritiker im Lichte von Pseudoklassizismus und Romantik*, Diss., Leipzig 1931, Introduction.

⁵ Gayley, Charles: *Methods and Materials of Literary Criticism*, London 1920; p. 567.

⁶ Tillyard, E.M.W.: *The English Epic and its Background*, London 1954; p. 13.

⁷ Newbery, John: *The Art of Poetry on a New Plan*, 1762; p. 180.

⁸ If we only cover the period from Blackmore's "Prince Arthur" (1695) to Ogil-

vie's "Britannia" (1801) this restriction requires an explanation. We justify it on the grounds that, firstly, since our subject is the crisis of epic poetry, and since we propose that this crisis becomes manifest for the first time in Milton's "Paradise Lost", only those writers are of interest who wrote after Milton. Blackmore's poem was the first epic that appeared after the publication of W. J.'s translation of Bossu's "Traité du Poème épique" (1695) which may be said to signify the beginning of specifically eighteenth-century formalism. Secondly, Ogilvie's poem, though not the last epic in the neoclassical manner, sufficiently proves that this type of epic had, by then, completely exhausted its possibilities.

2. *The Tyranny of the Cause*

¹ Dryden, John: *Parallel between Poetry and Painting* (Essays of John Dryden, ed. C.D. Yonge, London 1882), p. 145.

² Dennis, John: *Remarks on a Book Entitled Prince Arthur*, London 1696; p. 1.

³ Blackmore, Richard: *Prince Arthur*, London 1695; Preface pp. 11-12.

⁴ *ibid.*

⁵ Parnell, Thomas: *Essay on the Different Styles of Poetry*, London 1713; verses 358-360.

⁶ Trapp, Joseph: *Lectures on Poetry*, London 1742; p. 330.

⁷ *ibid.*, p. 334.

⁸ Brown, John: *Essay on the Characteristics of the Earl of Shaftesbury*, London 1751; pp. 20-21.

⁹ Johnson, Samuel: *Life of Milton* (ed. C. H. Firth, Oxford 1939); p. 64.

¹⁰ Warton, Joseph: *A Dissertation on the Nature and Conduct of the Aeneid* (Christopher Pitt's Translation of the Aeneid), London 1763; p. 2.

¹¹ Ogilvie, John: *Philosophical and Critical Observations on the Nature, Characters, and Various Species of Composition*, London 1774; vol. I, p. 162.

¹² Ogden, James: *The Revolution*, London 1790; Introduction p. XV.

¹³ Ogilvie, John: *Britannia*, Edinburgh/Aberdeen 1801; Preface p. 6.

¹⁴ Aristotle: *Poetics* (Works ed. W.D. Ross, vol. XI, Oxford 1924); § 8.

¹⁵ *ibid.*, § 6.

¹⁶ *ibid.*, § 10.

¹⁷ *ibid.*, § 6.

¹⁸ Bowra, C. M.: *From Virgil to Milton*, London 1945; p. 37.

¹⁹ Dryden, *op. cit.*, p. 143.

²⁰ Pemberton, Henry: *Observations on Poetry*, London 1738; p. 7.

²¹ *ibid.*, p. 8.

²² *ibid.*, p. 10.

²³ *ibid.*, p. 5-6.

²⁴ Hume, David: *Criticism of Wilkie's Epigoniad* (*Critical Review*, Articles IV (April) and VII (July) 1757; especially p. 331.

3. *The Identity of Cause and Hero - The Warrior-Statesman*

¹ Dryden, John: *Parallel between Poetry and Painting* (*Essays of John Dryden*, ed. C. D. Yonge, London 1882); p. 145.

² Blackmore, Richard: *Prince Arthur*, London 1695, Preface p. 3.

³ Pemberton, Henry: *Observations on Poetry*, London 1738; p. 23.

⁴ *ibid.*, p. 4.

⁵ Johnson, Samuel: *Life of Milton* (ed. C. H. Firth, Oxford 1939); p. 64.

⁶ Warton, Joseph: *An Essay on the Genius and Writings of Pope* (3rd edition), Dublin 1764; p. 100.

⁷ Duff, William: *An Essay on Original Genius*, London 1768; p. 137.

⁸ Ogilvie, John: *Britannia*, Edinburgh/Aberdeen 1801; Preface p. 24.

⁹ Dennis, John: *Remarks on a Book Entitled Prince Arthur*, London 1696; p. 9.

¹⁰ Blackmore, Richard: *Alfred*, London 1723; Dedication.

¹¹ Gildon, Charles: *The Laws of Poetry*, London 1721; p. 257.

¹² Gibbon, Edward: *Critical Observations on the Sixth Book of the Aeneid*, London 1770; p. 11.

¹³ Haylay, William: *An Essay on Epic Poetry*, London 1782; V/verse 288.

¹⁴ Ogden, James: *The Revolution*, London 1790; Introduction p. XIII.

¹⁵ Ogilvie, *op. cit.*, Dedication.

¹⁶ Addison, Joseph: *On the Chevy-Chase Ballad*, *Spectator* Nr. 70, 21. 5. 1711.

¹⁷ Blackmore, Richard: *King Arthur*, London 1697; I/p. 1.

¹⁸ Blackmore, Richard: *Prince Arthur*, London 1695; Preface p. 11.

¹⁹ *ibid.*

²⁰ Dennis, John: *The Advancement and Reformation of Modern Poetry*, London 1701; p. 67.

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²² *ibid.*, verses 77-79.

²³ Philips, Ambrose: *A Collection of Old Ballads*, London 1723; Prefaces.

²⁴ Addison, *op. cit.*, Nr. 70, 21. 5. 1711.

²⁵ Home, Henry, of Kames: *Elements of Criticism* (8th edition) 1807, vol. II, pp. 370-371.

²⁶ Reeve, Clara: *The Progress of Romance*, 1785; vol. I/p. 13.

²⁷ Blair, Hugh: *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres* (4th edition), London 1790; pp. 248-249.

²⁸ Aristotle: *Poetics* (Works ed. W. D. Ross, vol. XI, Oxford 1924); § 17.

²⁹ *ibid.*

³⁰ *ibid.*, § 9.

³¹ *ibid.*

4. *The Warrior Endangered*

¹ Blackmore, Richard: *Alfred*, London 1723; Preface p. 30.

² *ibid.*

³ *ibid.*, pp. 29-30.

⁴ *ibid.*, p. 33.

⁵ *ibid.*, p. 29.

⁶ *ibid.*, p. 31.

⁷ Pemberton, Henry: *Observations on Poetry*, London 1738; p. 11.

⁸ Blair, Hugh: *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres* (4th edition), London 1790; p. 219.

⁹ Trapp, Joseph: *Lectures on Poetry*, London 1742; p. 352.

¹⁰ *Review of the Critical Dissertations upon the Iliad by R. Kedington* (*Critical Review*, vol. IX), London 1760; p. 18.

¹¹ *ibid.*, p. 13.

- ¹² *ibid.*
¹³ *ibid.*, p. 19.
¹⁴ *ibid.*
¹⁵ *ibid.*, p. 19.
¹⁶ *ibid.*
¹⁷ *ibid.*, pp. 13–14.
¹⁸ Brown, John: *The History of the Rise and Progress of Poetry*, London 1764; pp. 64–65.
¹⁹ Mickle, William J.: *A Translation of The Lusiad by Camoens*, Oxford 1776; p. 144.
²⁰ *ibid.*
²¹ *ibid.*, p. 143.
²² *ibid.*, p. 144.
²³ *ibid.*, p. 147.
²⁴ Gibbon, Edward: *Critical Observations on the Sixth Book of the Aeneid*, London 1770; p. 11.
²⁵ Ogilvie, John: *Britannia*, Edinburgh/Aberdeen 1801; Preface p. 17.

5. The Moral Qualities of the Hero – The Sum Total of All Virtues

- ¹ Dryden, John: *A Discourse on Epic Poetry* (Cassel's National Library, London 1797); p. 107.
² Blackmore, Richard: *Prince Arthur*, London 1695; Preface p. 3.
³ *ibid.*, p. 10.
⁴ Dryden, John: *Parallel between Poetry and Painting* (Essays of John Dryden, ed. C. D. Yonge, London 1882); p. 144.
⁵ Dennis, John: *The Advancement and Reformation of Modern Poetry*, London 1701; Dedication.
⁶ Dryden, op. cit., p. 111.
⁷ Blackmore, op. cit., Preface p. 14.
⁸ Pope, Alexander: *The Odyssey of Homer*, London 1725; Preface p. XVIII.
⁹ Brown, John: *Essay on the Characteristics of the Earl of Shaftesbury*, London 1751; p. 21.
¹⁰ Wilkie, William: *The Epigoniad*, London 1769 (2nd edition); Preface p. 17.
¹¹ Warton, Joseph: *A Dissertation on the Nature and Conduct of the Aeneid* (Christopher Pitt's Translation of the Aeneid), London 1763; p. 2.
¹² Blair, Hugh: *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres* (4th edition), London 1790; p. 209.
¹³ Ogilvie, John: *Britannia*, Edinburgh/Aberdeen 1801; Preface p. 24.
¹⁴ *ibid.*
¹⁵ Philips, Ambrose: *A Collection of Old Ballads*, London 1723; Preface.
¹⁶ Pemberton, Henry: *Observations on Poetry*, London 1738; p. 4.
¹⁷ *ibid.*, p. 8.
¹⁸ Warton, J., op. cit., p. 1.
¹⁹ Duff, William: *An Essay on Original Genius*, London 1768; p. 137.
²⁰ Gibbon, Edward: *Critical Observations on the Sixth Book of the Aeneid*, London 1770; p. 11.
²¹ Blair, op. cit., p. 209.
²² Dennis, op. cit., p. 67.
²³ Wilkie, op. cit., Preface, p. vi.
²⁴ *ibid.*, p. VIII.
²⁵ *ibid.*
²⁶ *ibid.*, p. VII.
²⁷ Warton, J., op. cit., p. 6.
²⁸ Duff, op. cit., p. 132.
²⁹ *ibid.*
³⁰ *ibid.*, p. 136.
³¹ *ibid.*, p. 132.
³² *ibid.*, pp. 135–136.
³³ *ibid.*, pp. 137–138.
³⁴ *ibid.*, p. 133.
³⁵ Ogilvie, op. cit., Preface p. 18.
³⁶ *ibid.*
³⁷ Dryden, op. cit., p. 137.
³⁸ *ibid.*, pp. 153–154.
³⁹ *ibid.*, p. 163.
⁴⁰ *ibid.*, p. 142.
⁴¹ *ibid.*, p. 163.
⁴² *ibid.*, p. 143.
⁴³ *ibid.*
⁴⁴ Dennis, John: *Remarks on a Book Entitled Prince Arthur*, London 1696; pp. 47–48.
⁴⁵ *ibid.*, p. 47.
⁴⁶ *ibid.*, p. 48.
⁴⁷ Gildon, Charles: *The Complete Art of Poetry*, London 1718; vol. I, p. 272.
⁴⁸ Blackmore, Richard: *Alfred*, London 1723; Preface p. 43.
⁴⁹ *ibid.*, p. 42.
⁵⁰ Pemberton, op. cit., p. 166.

- 51 *ibid.*, p. 69.
- 52 Johnson, Samuel: *The Rambler* Nr. 4.
- 53 *ibid.*
- 54 *ibid.*
- 55 *ibid.*
- 56 *ibid.*
- 57 *ibid.*
- 58 *ibid.*
- 59 Wilkie, *op. cit.*, Preface p. VII.
- 60 *ibid.*, p. XVII.
- 61 *ibid.*
- 62 Brown, John: *The History of the Rise and Progress of Poetry*, London 1764; p. 66.
- 63 *ibid.*
- 64 *ibid.*, p. 64.
- 65 *ibid.*
- 66 *ibid.*
- 67 Duff, *op. cit.*, p. 135.
- 68 *ibid.*, p. 138.
- 69 Mickle, William J.: *A Translation of the Lusiad by Camoens*, Oxford 1776; pp. 146-147.
- 70 Blair, *op. cit.*, p. 209.
- 71 *ibid.*
- 72 Ogilvie, *op. cit.*, Preface p. 24.
- 73 *ibid.*, p. 14.
- 74 Dryden, John: *A Discourse on Epic Poetry* (Cassel's National Library, London 1797); p. 107.
- 75 *ibid.*
- 76 *ibid.*
- 77 Blackmore, Richard: *Prince Arthur*, London 1695; Preface p. 14.
- 78 *ibid.*
- 79 Addison, Joseph: *Spectator* 1. 3. 1712.
- 80 Parnell, Thomas: *Essay on the Different Styles of Poetry*, London 1713; verse 3.
- 81 *ibid.*, verses 285-287.
- 82 Gildon, *op. cit.*, p. 288.
- 83 *ibid.*
- 84 *ibid.*, p. 276.
- 85 Blackmore, Richard: *Alfred*, London 1723, Preface p. 40.
- 86 Trapp, Joseph: *Lectures on Poetry*, London 1742; p. 335.
- 87 Warton J., *op. cit.*, p. 6.
- 88 *ibid.*, p. 15.
- 89 Blair, *op. cit.*, p. 230.
- 90 *ibid.*
- 91 Aristotle: *Poetics* (Works ed. W. D. Ross, vol. XI, Oxford 1924); § 15.
- 92 *ibid.*, § 2.
- 93 *ibid.*, § 15.
- 94 *ibid.*, § 13.
- 95 *ibid.*, § 5.
- 96 W. J.: *A Translation of Monsieur Bossu's Treatise of the Epick Poem*, London 1695; p. 16.
- 97 *ibid.*
- 98 Dryden, John: *Parallel between Poetry and Painting* (Essays of John Dryden, ed. C. D. Yonge, London 1882); p. 142.
- 99 Dryden, John: *A Discourse on Epic Poetry* (Cassel's National Library, London 1797); p. 112.
- 100 Welwood, James: Preface to N. Rowe's Translation of Lucan's *Pharsalia*, 1718.

6. *The Dissolution of the Ideal Hero*

- 1 Welsted, Leonard: *A Dissertation Concerning the Perfection of the English Language, the State of Poetry etc.* (prefixed to *Epistles, Odes*), London 1724; p. XLI.
- 2 Goldsmith, Oliver: *Enquiry into the State of Polite Learning in Europe* (Works ed. P. Cunningham, London 1854), vol. II/p. 53.
- 3 Pope, Alexander: *The Odyssey of Homer*, London 1725; p. 274.
- 4 *ibid.*
- 5 *ibid.*, p. 271.
- 6 *ibid.*
- 7 *ibid.*, p. 276.
- 8 *ibid.*
- 9 *ibid.*, p. 273.
- 10 *ibid.*
- 11 *ibid.*
- 12 *ibid.*, p. 272.
- 13 Johnson, Samuel: *The Rambler* Nr. 4, 31. 3. 1750.
- 14 *ibid.*
- 15 Gordon, John: *Occasional Thoughts On the Study and Character of Classical Authors*, London 1762; p. 89.
- 16 *ibid.*, p. 90.
- 17 Haylay, William: *An Essay on Epic*

- Poetry, London 1782; V/verses 129-132.
- ¹⁸ Dryden, John: *Parallel between Poetry and Painting* (Essays of John Dryden, ed. C. D. Yonge, London 1882), p. 142.
- ¹⁹ *ibid.*
- ²⁰ Dennis, John: *Remarks on a Book Entitled Prince Arthur*, London 1696; p. 189.
- ²¹ *ibid.*
- ²² *ibid.*
- ²³ Pemberton, Henry: *Observations on Poetry*, London 1738; p. 151.
- ²⁴ *ibid.*, p. 156.
- ²⁵ *ibid.*, p. 25.
- ²⁶ Brown, John: *The History of the Rise and Progress of Poetry*, London 1764; p. 64.
- ²⁷ Blair, Hugh: *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres*, (4th edition), London 1790; p. 222.
- ²⁸ Ogilvie, John: *Philosophical and Critical Observations on the Nature, Characters, and various Species of Composition*, London 1774; vol. I/p. 153.
- ²⁹ Ogilvie, John: *Britannia*, Edinburgh/
- Aberdeen 1801; Preface p. 34.
- ³⁰ Pope, Alexander: *Receipt to Make an Epic Poem* (The Guardian Nr. 78, 10. 6. 1713).
- ³¹ Pope, Alexander: *The Odyssey of Homer*, London 1725; p. XX.
- ³² *ibid.*, pp. XVIII-XIX.
- ³³ *ibid.*, p. XIX.
- ³⁴ *ibid.*, p. 271.
- ³⁵ Trapp, Joseph: *Lectures on Poetry*, London 1742; pp. 335-336.
- ³⁶ Wilkie, William: *The Epigoniad*, London 1769; Preface p. 34.
- ³⁷ *ibid.*
- ³⁸ *ibid.*
- ³⁹ *ibid.*, p. 33.
- ⁴⁰ *ibid.*
- ⁴¹ *ibid.*
- ⁴² Webb, Daniel: *Remarks on the Beauties of Poetry*, London 1762.
- ⁴³ Beattie, James: *Dissertations Moral and Critical*, London 1783; p. 568.
- ⁴⁴ Heron, Robert: *Letters of Literature*, London 1785; LV/p. 485.
- ⁴⁵ *ibid.*, XXX/pp. 208-209.

7. *The God-assisted Hero – Rivalry between God and Man*

- ¹ Blackmore, Richard: *Alfred*, London 1723; Preface p. 1.
- ² Belsham, William: *Essays Philosophical and Moral, Historical and Literary*, London 1799; vol. II/p. 522.
- ³ Ogden, James: *The Revolution*, London 1790; Preface pp. XIX-XX.
- ⁴ Warton, Joseph: *A Dissertation on the Nature and Conduct of the Aeneid* (Christopher Pitt's Translation of the Aeneid), London 1763; p. 2.
- ⁵ Ogden, op. cit., p. XV.
- ⁶ Dennis, John: *The Advancement and Reformation of Modern Poetry*, London 1701; pp. 66-67.
- ⁷ Ogilvie, John: *Britannia*, Edinburgh/Aberdeen 1801; Preface p. 8.
- ⁸ Wilkie, William: *The Epigoniad*, London 1769; Preface, p. 18.
- ⁹ Blackmore, op. cit., Preface p. 38.
- ¹⁰ Trapp, Joseph: *Lectures on Poetry*, London 1742; p. 341.
- ¹¹ Mickle, William J.: *A Translation of The Lusiad by Camoens*, Oxford 1776; p. 13.
- ¹² *ibid.*, p. 137.
- ¹³ Dryden, John: *Parallel between Poetry and Painting* (Essays of John Dryden, ed. C. D. Yonge, London 1882); p. 142.
- ¹⁴ *ibid.*
- ¹⁵ Dennis, op. cit., p. 140.
- ¹⁶ Blackmore, op. cit., Preface p. 11.
- ¹⁷ *ibid.*, p. 2.
- ¹⁸ *ibid.*, p. 24.
- ¹⁹ *Review of the Critical Dissertations upon the Iliad by R. Kedington* (Critical Review, vol. IX), London 1760; p. 13.
- ²⁰ Brown, John: *The History of the Rise and Progress of Poetry*, London 1764; p. 65.
- ²¹ Richards, George: *An Essay on the Characteristic Differences between Ancient and Modern Poetry*, Oxford 1783;
- ²² Aristotle: *Poetics* (Works ed. W.D. Ross, vol. XI, Oxford 1924); § 24.
- ²³ *ibid.*

- ²⁴ *ibid.*, § 9.
²⁵ *ibid.*, § 25.
²⁶ Wilkie, *op. cit.*, Preface p. 37.
²⁷ Ogilvie, John: *Philosophical and Critical Observations on the Nature, Characters, and Various Species of Composition*, London 1774; vol. I, p. 332.
²⁸ Swift, Jonathan: *A Letter of Advice to a Young Poet* (Works ed. Scott, vol. IX); p. 407.
²⁹ Murphy, Arthur: on the epic (Gray's Inn Journal Nr. 92, 20. 7. 1754).
³⁰ Gordon, John: *Occasional Thoughts On the Study and Character of Classical Authors*, London 1762; p. 89.
³¹ *ibid.*
³² *ibid.*, p. 86.
³³ Home, Henry, of Kames: *Elements of Criticism* (8th edition), London 1807; vol. II/p. 389.
³⁴ *ibid.*, p. 387.
³⁵ Haylay, William: *An Essay on Epic Poetry*, London 1782; V/verses 55–62.

8. Conclusion – The Epic and the Meaning of "Rules"

- ¹ Swedenberg, H. T., jr.: *Rules and English Critics of the Epic* (Studies in Philology, vol. XXXV, 1938); conclusion.
² Blackmore, Richard: *Prince Arthur*, London 1695; Preface p. 9.
³ Blackmore, Richard: *King Arthur*, London 1697; Preface p. XIV.
⁴ Blackmore, Richard: *Alfred*, London 1723; Preface p. XXXIV.
⁵ *ibid.*, p. XXXV.
⁶ Dryden, John: *A Discourse on Epic Poetry* (Cassell's National Library, London 1797); p. 157.
⁷ Dryden, John: *Parallel between Poetry and Painting* (Essays of John Dryden, ed. C. D. Yonge, London 1882); p. 154.
⁸ *ibid.*, p. 155.
⁹ Johnson, Samuel: *The Rambler* Nr. 158, 21. 9. 1751.
¹⁰ *ibid.*
¹¹ Mickle, William J.: *A Translation of the Lusiad by Camoens*, Oxford 1776; p. 140.
¹² Pope, Alexander: *The Dunciad*, London 1729, p. 12 (Martinus Scribblers).
¹³ Welsted, Leonard: *A Dissertation Concerning the Perfection of the English Language, the State of Poetry etc.* (prefixed to Epistles, Odes); London 1724; p. XVI.
¹⁴ *ibid.*, p. XVIII.
¹⁵ W. J.: *A Translation of Monsieur Bosu's Treatise of the Epick Poem*, London 1695; p. 24.
¹⁶ Dennis, John: *The Grounds of Criticism in Poetry*, London 1704; Introduction.
¹⁷ Gildon, Charles: *The Laws of Poetry*, London 1721; p. 13.
¹⁸ Gildon, Charles: *The Complete Art of Poetry*, London 1718; vol. I, p. 6.
¹⁹ Ogden, James: *The Revolution*, London 1790; Preface p. XV.
²⁰ Ogilvie, John: *Britannia*, Edinburgh/Aberdeen 1801; Preface p. 1.

IV. THE EPIC POEMS OF THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY AND THEIR HEROES

1. *The Epic Poems of the Eighteenth Century (Synopsis)*

¹ It would have been impossible to list all the known epics of the century. The selection offered in this thesis is based on the comparatively high reputation these poems enjoyed in their own time, or on the degree of controversy they gave rise to, or on the distinctness with which they elucidate the symptoms of the decline.

We have omitted the epics on biblical subjects, since they neither contribute to the heroic dilemma, nor effectively continue Milton's ideas as they become manifest in "Paradise Lost". A list of eighteenth-century epics is contained in R. D. Havens's book on "The Influence of Milton", Cambridge/Harvard 1922.

2. *The Relationship between the Causes and their Heroes*

- ¹ Blackmore, Richard: *Prince Arthur*, London 1695; I/p. 3.
- ² *ibid.*, I/p. 9.
- ³ *ibid.*, I/p. 12.
- ⁴ *ibid.*, V/p. 127.
- ⁵ *ibid.*, IV/p. 110.
- ⁶ Blackmore, Richard: *King Arthur*, London 1697; Preface p. XI.
- ⁷ *ibid.*, I/p. 1.
- ⁸ *ibid.*, VI/p. 153.
- ⁹ *ibid.*, I/p. 10.
- ¹⁰ *ibid.*, I/p. 4.
- ¹¹ Glover, Richard: *Leonidas*, London 1737; I/p. 11.
- ¹² *ibid.*, VII/p. 251
- ¹³ *ibid.*, I/p. 26.
- ¹⁴ Ogilvie, John: *Britannia*, Edinburgh/Aberdeen 1801; XIII/p. 263.
- ¹⁵ *ibid.*
- ¹⁶ *ibid.*, I/p. 53.
- ¹⁷ Blackmore, Richard: *Eliza*, London 1705; IV/p. 87.
- ¹⁸ *ibid.*, II/p. 48.
- ¹⁹ Ogden, James: *The Revolution*, London 1790; II/p. 33.
- ²⁰ Blackmore, Richard: *Alfred*, London 1723; I/p. 2.
- ²¹ *ibid.*, III/p. 75.
- ²² *ibid.*, I/p. 14.
- ²³ Wilkie, William: *The Epigoniad*, London 1769 (2nd edition); I/p. 1.
- ²⁴ *ibid.*, I/p. 16.
- ²⁵ Blackmore, Richard: *King Arthur*, London 1697; IX/p. 247.

3. *The Constant Hero – The Stoic*

- ¹ Aristotle: *Poetics* (Works, ed. W. D. Ross, vol. XI, Oxford 1924); § 15.
- ² Dennis, John: *Remarks on a Book Entitled Prince Arthur*, London 1696; p. 74.
- ³ Blackmore, Richard: *Prince Arthur*, London 1695; I/p. 26.
- ⁴ *ibid.*, IV/p. 110.
- ⁵ *ibid.*, IV/p. 121.
- ⁶ *ibid.*, VI/p. 160.
- ⁷ *ibid.*, VI/p. 158.
- ⁸ *ibid.*, VIII/p. 217.
- ⁹ *ibid.*, I/p. 17.
- ¹⁰ *ibid.*, IV/p. 116.
- ¹¹ *ibid.*, IV/p. 117.
- ¹² Blackmore, Richard: *King Arthur*, London 1697; I/p. 1.
- ¹³ *ibid.*, V/p. 139.
- ¹⁴ *ibid.*, IV/p. 120.
- ¹⁵ *ibid.*, IV/p. 97.
- ¹⁶ Blackmore, Richard: *Alfred*, London 1723; IV/p. 107.
- ¹⁷ *ibid.*, I/p. 20.
- ¹⁸ *ibid.*, V/p. 147.
- ¹⁹ *ibid.*, IV/pp. 107–108.
- ²⁰ *ibid.*, I/p. 16.
- ²¹ *ibid.*, V/p. 164.
- ²² *ibid.*, V/p. 168.
- ²³ *ibid.*, I/p. 12.
- ²⁴ Blackmore, Richard: *Eliza*, London 1705; III/p. 61.
- ²⁵ *ibid.*, V/p. 133.
- ²⁶ Glover, Richard: *Leonidas*, London 1737; I/p. 10.
- ²⁷ *ibid.*, VII/p. 245.
- ²⁸ *ibid.*
- ²⁹ *ibid.*, VIII/p. 262.
- ³⁰ *ibid.*, IX/p. 302.
- ³¹ Ogilvie, John: *Britannia*, Edinburgh/Aberdeen 1801; I/p. 65.
- ³² *ibid.*
- ³³ *ibid.*, VII/p. 254.
- ³⁴ *ibid.*, VIII/p. 263.
- ³⁵ *ibid.*, XV/pp. 461–462.
- ³⁶ Ogden, James: *The Revolution*, London 1790; I/pp. 14–15.
- ³⁷ *ibid.*, V/p. 91.
- ³⁸ *ibid.*, II/p. 27.
- ³⁹ *ibid.*, VI/p. 104.
- ⁴⁰ About the “*Epigoniad*” in “*The Works of the British Poets*”, vol. XI, 1794.

4. *The Evil Principle and the Author's Bias*

- ¹ Aristotle: *Poetics* (Works, ed. W. D. Ross, vol. XI, Oxford 1924); § 24.
- ² see Chapter IV a.
- ³ Blackmore, Richard: *Eliza*, London

- 1705; IX/p. 258.
- ⁴ Blackmore, Richard: Prince Arthur, London 1695; I/p. 8.
 - ⁵ Blackmore, Richard: King Arthur, London 1697; II/p. 40.
 - ⁶ Ogilvie, John: Britannia, Edinburgh/Aberdeen 1801; II/p. 103.
 - ⁷ Blackmore, Richard: Prince Arthur, London 1695; I/p. 20.
 - ⁸ Blackmore, Richard: Eliza, London 1705; I/p. 5.
 - ⁹ Blackmore, Richard: King Arthur, London 1697; II/p. 40.
 - ¹⁰ Blackmore, Richard: Alfred, London 1723; I/p. 4.
 - ¹¹ *ibid.*
 - ¹² Ogilvie, *op. cit.*, II/p. 103.
 - ¹³ Blackmore, Richard: Prince Arthur, London 1695; VI/p. 177.
 - ¹⁴ Blackmore, Richard: King Arthur, London 1697; II/p. 36.
 - ¹⁵ *ibid.*, IX/p. 287.
 - ¹⁶ Blackmore, Richard: Eliza, London 1705; IX/p. 256.
 - ¹⁷ Blackmore, Richard: Alfred, London 1723; I/p. 3.
 - ¹⁸ Ogilvie, *op. cit.*, XX/p. 609.
 - ¹⁹ Blackmore, Richard: King Arthur, London 1697; VI/p. 155.
 - ²⁰ *ibid.*
 - ²¹ Blackmore, Richard: Prince Arthur, London 1695; V/p. 131.
 - ²² Blackmore, Richard: King Arthur, London 1697; I/p. 5.
 - ²³ *ibid.*, XII/p. 315.
 - ²⁴ *ibid.*, III/p. 76.
 - ²⁵ *ibid.*, III/p. 80.
 - ²⁶ Blackmore, Richard: Eliza, London 1705; II/p. 41.
 - ²⁷ *ibid.*, I/p. 23.
 - ²⁸ Blackmore, Richard: Alfred, London 1723; II/pp. 45-46.
 - ²⁹ *ibid.*, IV/p. 109.
 - ³⁰ *ibid.*, V/pp. 190-191.
 - ³¹ Glover, Richard: Leonidas, London 1737; III/p. 103.
 - ³² *ibid.*, II/p. 54.
 - ³³ *ibid.*, VII/p. 239.
 - ³⁴ *ibid.*, IX/p. 323.
 - ³⁵ Ogden, James: The Revolution, London 1790; I/p. 7.
 - ³⁶ *ibid.*, V/p. 86.
 - ³⁷ *ibid.*, VIII/p. 146.
 - ³⁸ Ogilvie, *op. cit.*, I/p. 57.
 - ³⁹ *ibid.*, I/p. 79.
 - ⁴⁰ *ibid.*
 - ⁴¹ *ibid.*
 - ⁴² *ibid.*, I/p. 80.
 - ⁴³ Wilkie, William: The Epigoniad, London 1769 (2nd edition); VIII/p. 174.

5. The Loss of Individual Action

- ¹ Ogilvie, John: Britannia, Edinburgh/Aberdeen 1801; XIX/p. 575.
- ² Blackmore, Richard: Eliza, London 1705; IV/p. 105.
- ³ *ibid.*, IV/p. 102.
- ⁴ *ibid.*, VIII/p. 226.
- ⁵ Ogden, James: The Revolution, London 1790; XII/p. 233.
- ⁶ Blackmore, *op. cit.*, VIII/p. 229.
- ⁷ *ibid.*, IV/p. 108.
- ⁸ Ogden, *op. cit.*, XII/p. 244.
- ⁹ *ibid.*
- ¹⁰ Blackmore, Richard: King Arthur, London 1697; I/p. 3.
- ¹¹ Blackmore, Richard: Prince Arthur, London 1695; I/p. 15.
- ¹² *ibid.*
- ¹³ *ibid.*, III/p. 86.
- ¹⁴ *ibid.*, I/p. 29.
- ¹⁵ *ibid.*, I/p. 30.
- ¹⁶ *ibid.*, IV/p. 95.
- ¹⁷ *ibid.*, V/p. 128.
- ¹⁸ Blackmore, Richard: King Arthur, London 1697; IX, VIII.
- ¹⁹ Blackmore, Richard: Eliza, London 1705; VIII/p. 211.
- ²⁰ Blackmore, Richard: Alfred, London 1723; I/p. 11.
- ²¹ Blackmore, Richard: King Arthur, London 1697; I/p. 2.
- ²² Ogden, James, *op. cit.*, III/pp. 47-48.
- ²³ Blackmore, Richard: Prince Arthur, London 1695; I.
- ²⁴ *ibid.*, II.
- ²⁵ *ibid.*, III.
- ²⁶ *ibid.*, VII.

- ²⁷ Ogden, op. cit., VII.
²⁸ Blackmore, op. cit., VII.
²⁹ Blackmore, Richard: King Arthur, London 1697; VI.
³⁰ Ogilvie, op. cit., IX.
³¹ Blackmore, Richard: Eliza, London 1705; VII.
³² Blackmore, Richard: Prince Arthur, London 1695; VII.
³³ Ogilvie, op. cit., XII.
³⁴ Blackmore, op. cit., VII.
³⁵ Ogden, op. cit., V/p. 92.
³⁶ Blackmore, Richard: Eliza, London 1705; II.
³⁷ *ibid.*
³⁸ *ibid.*, VII.
³⁹ Blackmore, Richard: Alfred, London 1723; VI.
⁴⁰ *ibid.*, IX.
⁴¹ Ogden, op. cit., IX.

6. *An Epic Poem 'On a New Plan': William Falconer's 'Ship Wreck'*

- ¹ Falconer, William: The Ship Wreck, London 1769 (3rd edition) I/verse 38.
² *ibid.*, II/verses 33-34.
³ *ibid.*, II/verses 35-36.
⁴ *ibid.*, III/verses 35-36.
⁵ *ibid.*, III/verse 56.
⁶ *ibid.*, I/verses 188-190; III/verse 148.
⁷ *ibid.*, I/verses 13-14.
⁸ *ibid.*, III/verse 904.
⁹ *ibid.*, III/verse 884.

V. THE HERO OF 'PARADISE LOST'

Note: All quotations from Milton's poetry are drawn from "Milton's Poetical Works", edited by Helen Darbishire, volumes I and II, Oxford 1952.

1. *'Paradise Lost' and its Significance in the History of the Epic*

- ¹ Milton, John: Elegia sexta, vol. II, verse 56.
² Milton, John: Mansus, in Sylvarum Liber, vol. II, verse 84 (Frangam Saxonicas Britonum sub Marte phalanges).
³ Milton, John: Reason of Church Government (Works of John Milton, New York, Columbia U. P., 1931; vol. III/part 1, p. 237).
⁴ Milton, John: Paradise Lost (vol. I), IX/verse 44.
⁵ Dennis, John: The Grounds of Criticism in Poetry, London 1704; Introduction.
⁶ *ibid.*
⁷ Gildon, Charles: The Laws of Poetry, London 1721; p. 259.
⁸ *ibid.*, p. 255.
⁹ Hanford, James H.: A Milton Handbook, New York 1954 (4th edition); p. 330.
¹⁰ Tillyard, E.M.W.: The English Epic and its Background, London 1954; p. 430.

2. *The 'Heroes' of 'Paradise Lost'*

- ¹ Milton, John: Paradise Lost (vol. I), IX/verse 44.
² Johnson, Samuel: Life of Milton (ed. C.H. Firth, Oxford 1939); p. 39.
³ Milton, John: Paradise Lost, IX/verses 27-28.
⁴ Addison, Joseph: Spectator, 9. 2. 1712.
⁵ Abercrombie, Lascelles: The Epic, London 1914; p. 83.
⁶ Saurat, Denis: Milton, Man and Thinker, London 1946 (2nd print); p. 184.
⁷ Addison, Joseph: Spectator, 5. 1. 1712.
⁸ Blackmore, Richard: Alfred, London 1723; Preface p. 24.
⁹ Addison, Joseph: Spectator 9. 2. 1712.
¹⁰ Johnson, op. cit., p. 73.
¹¹ *ibid.*
¹² Blair, Hugh: Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres (4th edition), London 1790; p. 284.
¹³ Pattison, Mark: Milton, New York; p. 196.

- ¹⁴ see Voltaire's *Treatise of the Epic Poem* and Waldock A. J. A.: *Paradise Lost and its Critics*, Cambridge 1947, p. 18.
- ¹⁵ Addison, Joseph: *Spectator*, 5. 1. 1712.
- ¹⁶ Clark, John: *A History of Epic Poetry*, Edinburgh/London 1900; p. 154.
- ¹⁷ Raleigh, Walter: *Milton*, London 1909 (3rd impression); p. 126.
- ¹⁸ Hutchinson, F. E.: *Milton and the English Mind*, London 1950 (2nd impression); p. 122.
- ¹⁹ Addison, Joseph: *Spectator*, 9. 2. 1712.
- ²⁰ Gildon, Charles: *The Laws of Poetry*, London 1721; p. 60.
- ²¹ Milton, John: *Paradise Lost*, I/verses 1-2.
- ²² Hanford, James H.: *The Dramatic Element in Paradise Lost* (*Studies in Philology*, University of North Carolina, vol. XIV, 1917); p. 195, Footnote.
- ²³ Milton, John: *Paradise Lost*, I/verse 254.
- ²⁴ *ibid.*, XII/verse 587.
- ²⁵ *ibid.*, IV/verse 75.
- ²⁶ Marvell, Andrew: lines prefixed to the 1674 edition of his works.
- ²⁷ Oldham, John: *Bion, a Pastoral* (*Works* ed. E. T. Thompson, 1770); vol. II/p. 65.
- ²⁸ *The Athenian Mercury*, 17. 9. 1692.
- ²⁹ Keats, John: *On a Lock of Milton's Hair*.
- ³⁰ Raleigh, op. cit., pp. 150-151.

4. *Adam and Eve as Epic 'Heroes'*

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- ² *ibid.*, III/verse 55.
- ³ *ibid.*, I.
- ⁴ *ibid.*, III.
- ⁵ *ibid.*, IV.
- ⁶ *ibid.*, VII.
- ⁷ *ibid.*, X.
- ⁸ *ibid.*, VII/verses 44-45.
- ⁹ *ibid.*, V/verses 564-566.
- ¹⁰ *ibid.*, V/verses 571-574.
- ¹¹ *ibid.*, VI/verse 893.
- ¹² *ibid.*, II/verse 667.
- ¹³ *ibid.*, IX/verses 415-416.
- ¹⁴ Hanford, James H.: *The Dramatic Element in Paradise Lost* (*Studies in Philology*, University of North Carolina, vol. XIV, 1917); p. 189.
- ¹⁵ Milton, John: *Paradise Lost*, I/verse 609.
- ¹⁶ *ibid.*, III/verse 99.
- ¹⁷ *ibid.*, III/verses 100-101.
- ¹⁸ *ibid.*, IX/verses 773-775.
- ¹⁹ *ibid.*, I/verses 641-642.
- ²⁰ Saurat, Denis: *Milton, Man and Thinker*, London 1946 (2nd print), p. 178.
- ²¹ Bush, Douglas: *Paradise Lost in Our Time*, New York 1948; p. 79.
- ²² Addison, Joseph: *Spectator*, 9. 2. 1712.
- ²³ Saurat, op. cit., p. 183.
- ²⁴ Milton, John: *Paradise Lost*, I/verses 653-654.
- ²⁵ *ibid.*, II/verses 349-351.
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- ²⁷ *ibid.*, II/verses 867-868.
- ²⁸ *ibid.*, IV/verses 986-987.
- ²⁹ *ibid.*, IV/verse 988.
- ³⁰ *ibid.*, V/verses 242-243.
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- ³⁷ Milton, John: *Paradise Lost*, IV/verse 519.
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- ⁴⁰ *ibid.*
- ⁴¹ *ibid.*, IV/verse 426.
- ⁴² *ibid.*, IV/verses 432-433.
- ⁴³ *ibid.*, IV/verse 443.
- ⁴⁴ *ibid.*, VI/verses 88-90.
- ⁴⁵ *ibid.*, VI/verses 198-200.
- ⁴⁶ *ibid.*, VI/verses 201-202.
- ⁴⁷ *ibid.*, VI/verse 236.
- ⁴⁸ *ibid.*, VI/verse 487.

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I attended the Elementary Schools in Basel and Birsfelden, and in 1942 entered the Realgymnasium in Basel, from which I matriculated in 1950. Subsequently I studied English, German and History at Basel University, attending the lectures and seminars of Professors W. Altwegg, E. Bonjour, R. Fricker, K. Jaspers, K. Jost, H. Lüdeke, W. Kaegi, W. Muschg, W. Stammler, F. Strich, H. Wagner and H. G. Wright, as well as those of Dr. Maria Schubiger and Dr. L. Wiesmann.

From October 1954 to October 1957 I acted as assistant lecturer at Queen's University, Belfast (Northern Ireland), returning from there to Basel University where, on 23rd November 1959, I passed my doctoral examination, with English as my major and with German and General History as my minor subjects. My thesis originated from a suggestion of Professor H. Lüdeke's. At the present time I am a teacher at the Kantonale Handels- und Verkehrsschule in Olten.

